

FRIENDS' AND ACQUAINTANCES

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BY THE AUTHOR OF
"EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE."

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PREFACE.



THE friend who persuaded me to print 'Episodes in an Obscure Life' is also responsible for the publication of the present series of sketches.

They are not all taken from a clerical stand-point, —recollections of boyhood, and experiences of the time during which I made a feeble attempt to become a business man, being included in the series.

If they should be fortunate enough to please as mere reading, I should, of course, be pleased ; but it would give me far greater gratification if they reminded even one of my readers, in a practical way, of humble people well worth knowing, struggles and suffering mournfully in need of aid and solace, griefs to be lightened, joys to be heightened by sympathy, within a stone's cast radius from his home.

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I.

TRAVELS BEHIND A PLOUGH.



AN impression obtains that farmers' labourers are stolidly indifferent to the beauties of the country. If this were universally true, it would be no great cause for wonder. Some preparatory schools for young gentlemen are kept by very good-looking young ladies, but unless they are exceptionally good-humoured also, they rarely number their pupils amongst the admirers of their charms. To most English peasants, analogously, nature, however lovely, presents herself as a stern task-mistress, demanding hard labour, and rewarding it with hard living. They see her in *all* her moods—frowning in work-a-day dishabille, as well as wearing the gay gala-dress and company-smile in which she greets her holiday visitors. It is hard work to get into raptures over a breezy upland, personally associated with rheumatism, gnawing, like a sleepless rat, at both shoulder-blades. A sun-gilt sheet of water may look very picturesque ; but a cottager dwelling on its banks shivers

with gloomy anticipation as he thinks of the ague-breeding mist that will brood over it when the sun has gone down.

Nevertheless, it was from an English ploughman, and in a county which has no fame for scenery, that I first found out that nature's stock of 'what do you think I've got to show you?' is inexhaustibly interesting for those who will only take the trouble to open their eyes to it; and that, unlike other shows, the oftener you see the same things in it, the more interesting they become. His own county was almost all of nature that he had seen. He had travelled only at the plough's tail. Although he had a drolly reverential faith in my 'book.larin', he was almost startled into incredulity when, by the aid of Cocker, or rather of Colenso, I made out the imposing number of miles he had so travelled in his lifetime. He had, it is needless to add, no scientific knowledge of nature (and such knowledge would have been of small interest to me then), but he had a keen, loving eye for the living things about him; and, though he was generally a man of few words, he amused himself, like his equally unscientific and far less practical brother naturalist, Goldsmith, by quaintly 'moralising' them occasionally.

A puny youngster, sick of physic, I heard with delight, which I took good care to curb within orthodox languid limits, the new *regimen* which the doctor at last prescribed for me—to wit, an exchange of alternating school-books and medicine-bottles for life at a farm-house, and milk fresh from the cow; and when I reached the farm-house, I may add, I was very careful not to grow well (in word, that is) too rapidly. As the day on which I started was not market-day, the carrier's cart was the only conveyance

open to me. Railways had not yet reached our parts : one—fiercely petitioned against—was, nevertheless, slowly approaching us ; but it was still some miles off ; and when a stray navvy, in nightcap and clay-stained jumper, drunkenly straggled into our old town, and went to sleep in some odd corner, we looked upon him as an audacious advance-guard of the enemy whom it would be almost lawful to put to death without waking him. He ought, at any rate, to be made a prisoner of war ; but the local constabulary were shy of tackling the stalwart intruders, even when they snored across the High-street pavement.

The old grey-tilted cart bobbed on, as if playing bo-peep with the cattle on the other side of the hedges—pulling up at almost every roadside public-house, delivering its jangling iron-rods at roadside smithies, its fascies of mops and brown-paper parcels of very miscellaneous goods at little roadside shops, and all kinds of things, in all kinds of coverings, at roadside private residences. At last, it put me down at the inn where my future friend, Sam Siggers, was waiting for me, in a dusty little gig, with his master's name painted in tall, thin, white letters on the back, drawn by a hog-maned Norway pony, looking slyly round his loose, chapped blinkers. Sam was the universal genius of the farm. He could plough, sow, mow, reap, shepherd, thatch, hedge—do all farmer's work, in short, better than any one else upon it ; and he had been selected to drive the sickly little ' towney ' to the farm in the gig-of-all-work. Coming to the comparatively large village where the carrier put me down was an ' event ' to Sam (there was no ' street ' in the parish to which we were bound), and he had put on his new green smock, crinkled

like a primrose leaf on the shoulders and the breast, in honour of the occasion. He was tall, lean, brown, middle-aged—manly-looking, in spite of his stooped shoulders, and the heavy way in which he lifted his feet, just as if he was pulling them out of clayey puddles. The boots were laced so tight that his legs looked like mere black sticks just below the brown bulge of the buskined calves. He had brown, contemplative eyes, like those of a good-tempered bullock chewing the cud, but with a twinkle of fun in them now and then, which the bullocks have not got. 'Beasts' grow very grave as they advance in years, and seem to forget that they ever twisted their tails and scampered about as calves. Their life appears to be overshadowed by the ever-present recollection that 'all flesh is beef.'

Because he had heard that I was not strong, Sam considered it to be part of his duty to lift me into the gig, and he handled me as if he was afraid that I should break. I thought it very strange that he should be so shy at first, when he was such a great strong man, and I was such a weak little boy. We soon, however, became excellent friends. He found out that, though I did come from the town, and had been at school, I knew next to nothing about things which were more familiar to him than A B C, and when he saw that I was interested in them, his tongue-strings quickly loosened. I remember one of the first lessons which I received in rural matters. 'That there, sir,' said Sam, pointing with his whip, 'is what we calls a stack.' He did not say it for a joke, but quite seriously. When a heron had flown high over our heads, with his long legs stretched behind him, I had asked

Sam what it was—so how should I know anything about haystacks?

During the time I stayed at the farm Sam Siggers was my guide, philosopher, and friend. I found him out in the fields when he was on his 'travels;' and when he was not at work, I used to ramble abroad and potter about his cottage with him. He lived in a thatched, black-boarded cottage by the horse-pond. There was a long, narrow strip of garden-ground at the side, running up to a point—it had been taken in from the road. It was shaped like a horn, and it looked like a horn of plenty, with its jumble of vegetables, apple-trees, and fruit bushes, balm, pot-herbs, and old-fashioned flowers. Sam was too honest a fellow to steal corn, and, therefore, he was allowed to keep a pig and a little poultry. He kept bees too; and so, for a labourer, he was comparatively well off. All his children were out at service, except one daughter, who was laid up at home with a spinal complaint. Mrs Siggers seemed to look upon this daughter as a great encumbrance, but Sam was always kind to her. He used to sit by her, reading the Bible, when she wished him, and because she was fond of flowers he had nailed up a rose-tree so that the blossoms could look in at her bed-room window. Sam was as fond of flowers as his daughter, and talked about them as if they could understand him. In the beginning of the spring I spent at the farm he was feeding his bees with a plateful of sugar and salt and beer, when some of the bees flew off the plate, and buzzed about a golden-rod that was planted near. Of course it had no blossoms on it then, and so they soon came buzzing back, as if they

were very much disgusted. 'Ah, but they'll think a deal of she,' Sam explained to me, just as if he feared the golden-rod might be hurt in her feelings, 'when November comes, and she's out and all the other flowers is gone. She's a friend in need, she is.' Sam had a good deal of quiet humour in him, and when he told me that I could easily tell which were the drones, because they made the most noise, he added, slyly, 'like other folks in the world that don't do nothing.' He did not mind destroying wasps in the interest of his bees, 'because they was like fierce French sojers come to rob honest English folk,' but he spared the butterflies. 'Some says you should kill 'em,' he said, 'but it seems a pity like, when they'll die so soon without your killing on 'em. They're most as pretty as the flowers about a garden.' He taught me to see, too, that the butterfly is misrepresented in being called a fluttering trifler—'a lazy gadabout' was Sam's phrase. They only flew from leaf to leaf, he told me, to find one unoccupied as well as fit on which to lay their eggs. 'There's Christians don't care as much about their young uns,' commentated Sam. 'They'll drop 'em anywheres to fend for theirselves, food or no food.'

When swarming time came, both Sam and I chanced to be at hand, and I was promoted to the dignity of tinkling on the basin with the key, whilst Sam went off to borrow his daughter's veil and gather an armful of fresh nettles. Although assured that the bees would not harm me if I didn't 'rile 'em,'—not even if they settled on me, so long as I stood still,—I felt very nervous as they buzzed angrily round in dizzying and deafening mazes, darkening the air; and very much relieved when they

began to congregate about the branch of a currant bush, which they soon bent almost to the ground with an Eshcol cluster of close-packed brown bodies and gauzy wings. When Sam had deftly tilted the new hive under the swarm, and placed them with the nettles still about their fresh home upon a board, he moralised the occasion as he took off the veil. 'There, no harm's done, you see. Bees is very easy to deal with, if you let 'em have their own way, and help 'em to it. But ain't it wonderful the sense there is in them little things?—packing themselves tight a-purpose for me to get 'em in, or p'raps it's because they're afeard their queen should run away.' I am not sure now that Sam's explanations of natural history were always as accurate as his observations of it, but I shall report him faithfully to the best of my recollection.

His fowls he believed, according to the old notion, to be thanking God when they held up their heads after drinking; and, at the worst, such 'grandmothers' theories of the universe' are only wrong in the particular instances they have selected for proofs. Sam's poultry cost him very little to keep—a handful of corn now and then, a little bran, and a few boiled potatoes. The ducks almost 'found themselves' in the pond, and the fowls straggled and scratched about the lane, helping themselves to seeds, sow-thistle, and chick-weed. I used to help Sam in hunting for their eggs in the grassy ditches. —It was during one of these hunts when I had said that the field crickets were making an uncommon row, and had noticed, too, that the flowers of the chickweed were shut up, that he told me these were both signs of rain. 'In fine weather,' he said, 'the chick opens at nine and shuts up

at noon, just as if it had got a clock. 'Ain't it wonderful how all them little things does what they was meant to do? It don't seem so strange about the big things that anybody can see, but He must be a great God to keep such a lot o' little things in order that nobody can't count.'

Spring ploughing was going on when I reached the farm. As I lay in my little room—the bars of the lattice that overlooked the yard gradually becoming distinct in the morning twilight—I could hear the heavy-hoofed cart-horses clumping and clattering by to work; and as soon as I had finished my basin of bread and milk, not *at* but *in*, the great kitchen fireplace (it ran into the wall like a little room, with a low settle on each side), I was off to the forty-acres in search of Sam. Two or three teams besides his were crossing the great field like slow shuttles, but Sam's could be distinguished from afar by a young piebald horse, of which he was very proud. The other men called it 'the carcus colt,' but Sam called it 'Sloe-blossom.' It was quite a journey to plod from hedge to hedge over that heavy field, but backwards and forwards across it I used to trudge with Sam, until I could hardly lift my legs, they ached so, and my shoes were so balled with clay. Sometimes Sam put me on one of the horses, and sometimes he took me between his hands and let me fancy that I was doing the ploughing, and sometimes I lagged behind, just ahead of the glossy rooks that followed the plough as regularly as we did—fluttering a little way off when we turned at the headlands—to gobble the greasy, white, red-headed grubs and the moist radish-like worms which the share turned up. Sam talked very little whilst he was at work. I asked him

once what he was thinking about. 'To make my stetches straight,' was the answer. 'A mill's about the only thing that can clack when it's workin'.' But when he sat down under the hedge to munch his noon-day bread and cheese or bacon, he made amends for his long silence; talking with the mouth full being no breach of his code of etiquette. 'Them's young cockehafers,' he explained in reference to the grubs. 'They eats up everything they can get hold of, but then, you see, the rooks eat them, so I s'pose that's what they was made for. It seem queer though, if we was meant to grow corn, that the cock-chafers should ha' been taught to lay their eggs in the ground, for the grubs is very mischeevous. P'raps we was meant to grow it for 'em.' Another time, as we sat against the clayey hedgebank, Sam called my attention to what looked like a bit of cobwebby mortar; but when he gently prized it open with the point of his knife, and then let it go again, it shut-to like a spring door. He opened it with a stick next, and pushed the stick a little way into the hole inside, and after he had wriggled it about, brought it out covered with silky spider's web. 'There, sir,' said Sam, as if he was proud of living in a neighbourhood that could boast such cleverness, 'that's a spider's house. It's got reg'lar walls as well as a door. I've dug 'em out to have a look at 'em, and there's mortar walls, and this soft stuff is the parlour paper like. Ain't it wonderful them little things should know how to do all that—just as if they was bricklayers and carpenters?'

Sam's garden made a gay show in spring and early summer, with its succession of yellow and purple crocuses, golden daffodils, white lilac, and lilac lilac ('laylock' was

Sam's word), wall-flowers, stocks, white lilies, tawny tiger-lilies, tulips, peonies, pinks, roses, sweet-williams, marigolds, columbines, apple-blossoms, and puce and pink and sulphur hollyhocks; but Sam's daughter had a craving for wild-flowers. 'They seemed to make her breathe freer like,' she said. Accordingly Sam and I used to gather them for her in armfuls—primroses, and white violets and blue violets; buttercups and daisies, dog-roses and bell-bind, paigles and ox-lips, pale-blue wild chicory and strong-scented tunhoof. The first spray of blackthorn Sam found in blossom he took home to his daughter, and he did the same when the May came out.

We were in a little wood in the evening, gathering the thick-stalked wild hyacinths that made great patches of blue in the green grass, and the pale wild anemones that trembled on their hair-stalks between the moss-gloved fingers of the tree-roots, when we heard the cuckoo for the first time that year. 'The old women says that you should wish when you hear him first,' remarked Sam; 'but that seems piggish to me. Ain't it enough to know that the fine weather is comin'? It's queer how them birds keeps to theirselves,' he went on, 'when they gets over here—it's hard to ketch sight o' one. And yet I've seed 'em by the half-dozen and more together when they first come over, down by the Backwater. I s'pose they finds the sea lonesome, and so they sticks together there. Ain't it wonderful how they should know just when this country's ready for 'em, and find their way all them miles from furrin parts? There he goes—him with the yaller legs.'

The farm swarmed with wood-pigeons—*dows* Sam

called them ; and Sam, being a good shot, was sometimes intrusted with the farmer's gun to make a retaliatory raid upon the saucy thieves. Whenever I could, I accompanied him on these occasions, but I could not often manage it, because I always came back to breakfast from the dewy woods with trouser legs so sodden, and shoes so void of polish, that the good farmer's wife used to ask, in querulous despair, whatever was the good of any one taking care of *me*, or having *my* boots blacked? Sam took a sportsman's pride in bringing down the plump, ash-coated, rainbow-necked robbers, but his general love of birds troubled his enjoyment. 'Seems hard to kill 'em, don't it?' he used to say, 'just because they help 'em-selves when they're peckish. It's nice of a hot Sunday artemoon to hear 'em cooin' when you're settin' in church.'

The church to which we went—a very little church with a wooden steeple—had woods all round it. I generally managed to walk to and from service with Sam, because he showed me birds'-nests. He did not think it a sin to show them to me then ; but he would not let me take any of the eggs. 'We're a-resting,' he used to say, 'and let *them* rest too.' He was not quite so strict on week-days ; but still he never encouraged me in birds'-nesting. 'They're prettier where they be—so let 'em bide,' was his argument. 'You could easy pull that to pieces,' he said, pointing to a round, mossy thrush's nest, with four jet-dotted blue eggs lying on the smoothly-plastered floor ; 'but you couldn't make nothing—no, not half a quarter as good. And if you was to blow the eggs, you'd smash 'em in a week. Now, if you let 'em

be, there'll be four mavishes next year, singin' in Janivery, maybe. It's cheery to hear 'em when there ain't a bud on the hedges.—Them's young blackbirds,' he said, as we peeped into another nest. 'Them three darkest is the young cocks. I must take one o' they as soon as his tail sprouts, because my poor Hester have took a fancy to have a blackbird. There's no harm in that, if you feed 'em well.—You see that chaffinch up there on the apple tree,' he said to me another time. 'Well, his beak's blue now; but it was white a while ago. Their beaks turns blue just afore they begins to sing. Birds and men is very much alike in some things. Jack Musset's beak al'ays turns red afore he begins to sing at the "Leather Bottle," and the wives don't get much o' the singin'. It's queer, too, that the hen-birds shouldn't be nigh so smart as the cocks—though *that* ain't much like some o' our wives. That's all my joke, you know; but some on us might larn a lesson from the birds. There's the bullfinches. See how they sticks together, and the cock is al'ays a-kissin' and a-talkin' kind like to his mate.'

When the swifts came in May, Sam took up his parable in reference to them also. Sometimes he seemed to me not to be talking to me in particular, but, having the excuse of some one to talk to, to be merely thinking aloud. 'I've heerd tell that they can fly hundreds o' miles at a stretch, an' yet they couldn't walk a foot. They've got no legs to speak on. Get 'em down on the ground, and they flounder about like a fish out o' water. They was fitted for the air, with them long wings o' theirs, just as the fishes is for the sea. They make me think somehow o' my little gal. She was the first we ever had,

and we made a deal on her, as folks al'ays do with their first babbies. But she died when she was two year old ; and though we've had nigh upon a dozen since, I miss my little gal at times, and wish I'd got hēr back. But then I think she's a little angel now—she wouldn't feel no more at home down here than the swifts does. So it's all for the best.'

When the time for the singing of nightingales was come, Sam took me one evening to a little meadow between two woods, where he correctly prophesied that I should hear them by the dozen. The meadow was tufted with withering cowslips, and 'cowslips and nightingales,' said Sam, 'al'ays goes together. Yes, you can hear 'em plain enough now, pretty critturs ; but you could hear 'em by day too, if you only listened. That's summut like the Bible, I think. We don't pay much heed to it betimes when we hears it read at church. We're thinkin' about wages, an' the weather, an' the crops, an' that ; but when ye gets laid on yer back, like my poor Hester, it sound sweetlike when ye're so lonesome, an' ain't got no other comfort.'

Very little work was done at the farm on Whit-Monday. The parish's benefit club, headed by the parish orchestra, converted for the nonce into the parish band (the Sunday performer on the bass-viol selecting the drum as a more portable secular instrument) marched, with blue banners flying, up to and into the parish church, to attend service and pretend to listen to the annual club sermon. After service there was dinner in a tent, in a meadow, and the day was wound up very boisterously at the 'Leather Bottle.' Sam went to the dinner, but he

did not go to the 'Leather Bottle.' 'Clubs is good things,' he said, 'if so much o' the money didn't go in drink. Some o' the parsons don't like to have the flags brought inside, but I can't see the harm o' that. But it do seem queer to go to church in the mornin', and then to get drunk at the "Leather Bottle."' So Sam stayed at home with Hester. They had the cottage to themselves, for Mrs Siggers was out, like the other women, to see all that was going on, and I was similarly employed.

Next morning we began to cut, and in a day or two mowers and haymakers were busy on every farm in the parish. It was glorious weather for haysel : a golden sun in a bright blue sky, with just breeze enough to keep the air from being sultry. The long grass stirred gently like a summer sea, and half drowned the creamy hawthorn hedges. The air was laden with the aroma of clover, and melilot, and sweet-scented vernal grass. The larks were singing up above, and men, women, and children were laughing down below. Their laughter did not always sound so merry if you heard the jokes.

Sam was one of the mowers. It seemed so easy to swish the sharp blade through the grass that I asked him to let me try ; but I only drove the point into the ground. The other men laughed so, that I felt pleased when one of them drove his scythe into the ground—into an old ant-hill. He began to swear at the little vermin, but Sam said, 'No, God won't do that, Smith. He made ants as much as he made us.' 'What did He make 'em for then ?' Sam was puzzled at first for an answer. They had done so much mischief in his garden that he had been obliged to dig in ashes round his apple trees, but still, because

they *had* been created, he felt bound to stand up for them. When the men saw that he was puzzled, they began to laugh at him, but presently he said, 'Why, to teach us not to stand still. Go to the ar., thou slug-gard,' and that turned the laugh on the other man.' It was only when he was sharpening his scythe, or taking his 'beevers,' that I could get much talk with Sam in the hay-field. But I trotted after him like a little dog, and when he had a chance he moralised, according to his wont, the events of the day. One day we had got a mole, and Sam blew away the silky hair to let me see its eyes. 'As blind as a mole, they says,' said Sam, 'but there's his eyes, and yet they keeps on sayin' it. I'm puzzled sometimes to give a reason for things. I was riled a-Tuesday because I couldn't answer Smith back about them ants. But I don't doubt there's good in 'em, any more than the mole's got eyes, if we went the right way to look for it.'

When the hay had been cut, and tossed, and cocked, and carried—littering the trees that joined hands across the lanes with wisps that the birds would have been glad of a few weeks before—and forked up into stacks under tarpaulins, and combed into neatness of side, and thatched into security of top, an atmosphere of languor brooded for awhile over the farm. The weeders and the rabbits seemed the only busy creatures on it. The woods grew darker, the hedges grew dusty. Bees were ever humming drowsily round the flowering sweet-lime in the farm garden. The luscious-scented blossoms dropped off in the blue-green bean fields. Green corn was fast becoming golden, with heavy ears which, in heavy land, tapped

sleepily, as the wind softly moved them, against even a tall man's hat. The brown coveys of young partridges that sprang whirring up in sudden fright, and then as suddenly dropped like stones into the goldening green seas, spangled with blue corn-flower and rough-stalked scarlet poppies, were daily growing less distinguishable from their papas and mammas.

During this waiting time Sam obtained leave to take me for a row on the Backwater. On our road down we passed a field in which there was almost as much ryle—bearded darnel—as barley. The sight disgusted Sam. 'Our master,' he said, '*would* take on if we'd got a piece like that. Did you ever hear, sir, that them's the tares we read on in Scriptur'? I was right glad when our parson told us that, for I could never make head nor tail o' that about the good seed an' the tares, you know, afore. We give the hosses tares for green food. I can understand it now. It look summut like corn, don't it? But it's a rare thing to make a man stupid, is ryle. I've knowed a man get drunk on a quartern loaf, when the ryle had got into the meal. What's them? Them's barberries. They'll be as red as the poppies come Michaelmas. I showed ye a barberry bush down by the pond in the forty-acres, wi' the yaller blossom, you know. There's some farmers wouldn't have barberries so nigh a barley-field, but Mr Bultitude don't seem to set great store on his crops. They says barberries can blight corn, like the witches, just by lookin' at it.' My next question was about a tree. 'Why, sure-ly, sir, you ought to know him by this time. An ash, that is. There's a lot just inside the park gates. I showed 'em to ye when they was in flower. The flowers comes

out afore the leaves, like that almond tree master's got in his garden. The leaves seems to wait till they're sure as it's goin' to keep warm afore they'll come out; an' arter all, they drops off afore the other leaves does. I should like to know the meanin' o' that. They should teach ye them things at your school.'

The Backwater was a long, broad, straggling waste of salt water, formed by some long-forgotten inburst of the sea through the low coast-line. On all sides but one there was a dreary spread of damp, dyked, coarse-herbaged marshes, protected from inundation by a grassy sea-wall, with a fringe of spiry samphire between its foot and the streaming mud-banks, over which the long-legged, dull green and yellow little crabs sprawled at low water. At the head of the lagoon stood the 'Leather Bottle,' a low, lonely, beetle-browed public-house, with an uncanny look about it. Its gibbeted sign creaked under the shade of an aspen, ever shivering as if in recollection of unholy sights that it had witnessed. 'They says,' said Sam, 'as the aspen shakes because Christ's cross was made on it: but I don't see why it should shake for that. It warn't the aspen's fault; an' if our blessed Saviour hadn't a-been crucified, what would ha' become o' us? Yes, it is a lonesome place, an' there's been queer doin's here—'specially in the old smugglin' times. In my time, Sam Rouse, the Stoke ridin'-officer, was made away with somewheres down here. Any ways, he was last heered of at the "Leather Bottle." They're a rough lot, the bargemen as uses it.' As Sam spoke, a solitary tan-sailed barge was slowly coming up the Backwater. When we pushed off from the rusty-piled, rusty-ringed little wharf, our boat and

the barge were the only craft on it. The rumbling of the oars in the rowlocks, the splash of the water against their blades, the popple against the bows and the mud-banks, and round the swaying reeds, the sigh of the wind, a wail now and then from a marsh bird, a sullen low from a marsh bullock, and the distant yelping of the dog on board the barge, were the only sounds that we could hear. 'Yes, it is lonesome,' said Sam; 'an' they says the sea keeps on eatin' and eatin' away, an' will come in on us some day. There's only about ninety acres left o' Claythorpe out yinder. The wheat grows right by the water, an' there's stones, they says was the church, a quarter o' a mile out at sea. There must be some wise meanin' in that, but it seem queer somehow that the sea should be let to eat up the good land. It's like Pharer's lean beasts eatin' up the fat uns, for there's no fish to speak of to be caught in the Backwater. The wild ducks comes, though, an' the wild geese comes too. What knowin' birds *them* are! He must be wise as made em', to have such a sight o' knowledge to give away. I've seed them grey critturs walkin' over a field that had been sowed broadcast, just as if they was sojers—peckin' as they went, an' one on 'em walkin' wi' his head up, and lookin' about as if he was a officer. He's on the look-out, ye see, an' if he sees anybody comin' he gives a cackle, and up they flies, and falls in just like sojers—on'y they've the sense to fall in in a wedge like.'

We landed, to stretch our legs, at a place where there had once been copperas works. The site had been blighted by them into black barrenness. Little heaps of dingy bricks, and pools still scummed with dull irises,

made it look very dreary. 'They used to make it,' explained Sam, 'out o' the stones they picked up' on the sands out yinder, so, you see, the sea's some good. Most things is, if you can on'y get to the bottom on 'em. But it must ha' been nasty kind o' work. When you're ploughin' an' harrer'in', you can think as you're workin' along wi' God like, instid o' makin' man's messes. Not as *He* wants any help. I get stupid like when I think o' the sight o' things He's made, an' the uses there is for 'em. Now, while I'm speakin', there's a puff-ball. I shouldn't like to eat one that growed anywheres hereabouts—the copper might ha' got into 'em; but mostly they does you no harm. And yet, if you burns 'em, the smoke makes the bees drunk—dead-drunk like. Ain't that queer?'

As we pulled back, Sam showed me the Peewits' Island. 'They al'ays comes on St George's Day, an' they sits on their eggs, without ever goin' to sleep, till the little uns is hatched. Anyhow, that's what folks says, an' there's stranger things than that. They must care a sight for their little uns. Look how they cuts about, hangin' down their wings as if they was broke, when they thinks you wants to grab the little uns.


During our walk home from the Leather Bottle Wharf, we saw a glow-worm gleaming on a hedgebank. 'Yes, that's a glow-worm,' said Sam. 'You've heered about them, have ye? They calls it a worm, but it's a sort o' brown beetle like—not much to look at when you sees it by daylight. I've caught 'em with wings and without wings, an' kep' 'em in a pill-box. It's the one that ain't got wings that shines the most. That's the she, I reckon. T'other chap can gad about, and so God's made her look

cheerful like, to make him want to come home to her. The house looks twice as cheery when you can see the fire shinin' through the winders, when you comes home as wet as muck.'

In spite of my efforts to the contrary, I had manifestly grown well so rapidly that I was doomed to re-exchange free farm life for cramped farm life before harvest. Sam drove me to meet the carrier on a bleak November day that had been intercalated into the golden August. 'The wind's in the east,' he said, as he bade me good-bye, 'an' the caterpillars will be swarmin' in my garden. It's queer that bad things like them should come together, but then, you see, you gets them both over together. You won't forget the stuff my Hester ast ye to ax yer mar about?'

II.

‘JAMAICA JAMES.’

F you please, Mr Fenn, why do they call you Jamaica James?’ I suddenly inquired of the grizzled old mariner who was my bosom friend during the first summer month I spent at Spratlingsea in my early boyhood. •

‘Why, you see, sir,’ answered Mr Fenn—taking his short black pipe out of his mouth to point with—‘I was one o’ them as helped to get the people out o’ the *Jeemaiky*, West Hingie-man, when she druv ashore at the foot o’ the Poor’s Cliff yinder, and so they called me Jeemaiky Jeems. Whereas, you know, sir,—

“Jeems Fenn is my name,
England is my nation,
Spratlingsea is my dwelling-place,
An’ Christ is my salvation.”

P'r'aps it ain't for me to make so bold, but I'll hope so—I'll hope so,' the old man added, in reference to the last

line, as he reverently pushed back his low-crowned hat, and pulled his iron-grey forelock.

My friend's explanation of his nick-name rather disappointed me. I had hoped to be told that he had been born in Jamaica, and to hear stories of earthquakes and hurricanes, buccaneers, slavers, and Maroons.

Still a big-ship wrecked on sands on to which I could have pitched a stone—a ship whose crew the old man I was walking with had helped to save, was not a subject to be passed over in that cursory fashion.

'But, Mr Fenn,' I objected, 'if you weren't the only one that saved them, why should you be called Jamaica all to yourself?'

'Well, you see, sir, it was me as managed to get the line aboard. We'd none o' them rockets in those days. Twenty times an' more the waves knocked me down—three times my mates hauled me ashore, with the blood comin' out o' my eyes an' my ears as well as my mouth an' my nose—but I was young and wentursome then. As soon as I could get my breath, at it I went agin, till at last I got hold of a bit o' line the Hingiemans crew heaved me, an' they hauled me aboard—and a set o' lubbers they were, too, for they run my head up agin the cathead. Forty thousand candles I see dancin', an' I thought I must ha' let go. I didn't, though, and every soul aboard, except the monkey, was saved, thank God! Some on 'em scrambled ashore along my line, you see, sir, and them that wasn't game to, was hauled along it in a kind o' hammock like, when we'd rigged a tacklin'. I tried to catch 'Jenny—that was the monkey's name—but she bit so I couldn't, you see, sir. "Come along, mate," says

the skipper, "you an' me's the last, an' I'm a-goin'. Sure you wouldn't risk your life for a monkey." But when I see how some o' the men as I'd risked my life for went on when they got ashore, I was in two minds as to whether the monkey worn't better worth savin'. Not but what the Spratlingsea people—fishermen and farmers' folk, too—was every bit as bad.

'You see, sir, the *Feemaiky* was an old ship, and one tide broke her up. The sugar hogsheads and the rum-casks was soon dancin' about like bungs, and as sure as a rum-cask come ashore, it was broached, an' them as got hold on it drunk theirselves into the horrors. It was Christmas time then, an' for a long time there was a sayin' that it was the jolliest Christmas as ever was known in Spratlingsea. But that kind o' bein' jolly ain't to my taste now, and it worn't then. I allus liked my pipe. It's a comfort an' a companion like to a lonely old man, when I'm out fishin' at night, you see, sir, and when I'm a-settin' in the dark at home. Mayhap you may laugh, sir, but I like to see the red 'baccy a-peepin' up over the bowl when I'm a-settin' in the dark. It's like a mate dropped in for a yarn, you see. "Keep your heart up, old chap," it seems to say. "You've rubbed through a deal in your time, an' you'll rub through the little life that's left to you. There's God above all." Yes, sir, I thank God for my pipe.

'Old folks, they say, allus thinks their young times best; but though Spratlingsea ain't what it ought to be yet by a long chalk, I can see a change for the better in it. There ain't near the drinkin' an' the riotin' there used to was. Everybody did what was right in his own eyes,

as the Bible says, in the times I'm tellin' ye of. Every fisherman was a smuggler, an' the farmers an' the farmers' folk was in league with 'em. Why, that winter, just afore the *Jeemaiky* was wrecked, there was a ridin' officer found down in the marshes, with a bullet in his head, an' three stabs atween his ribs. Ah, them was sad, wild times.'

'It must have been a long, long while ago, Mr Fenn.'

'Yes, 'tis ; an' yet I remember it all better than what happened yesterday. I'm seventy-seven come Michaelmas, an' I was on'y just turned twenty when the Hingie-man druv ashore at the foot of the Poor's Cliff.'

'Why is it called the Poor's Cliff?'

'Well, you see, sir, hundreds o' years ago, a good lady left lands for the poor o' Spratlingsea ; but long afore my time the sea had swallowed 'em all up except that there cliff. It makes me think o' myself somehow, the Poor's Cliff do, sir. All my old mates is gone, an' the sea's had most on 'em. Of them as calls me Jeemaiky Jeems, there ain't scarce one in the whole parish as see the *Jeemaiky* lost, except Mrs Cardinal up at the Almshouses—the red uns by the church I mean, with the grey stone in front, with the houtlandish bird cut on it. There's readin', too ; but all that I could ever make out is that Dame Lucy Dean left them tenements for the solacement of six worthy widows of master mariners born in this parish ; an' I suppose that's all that anybody need make out, though there's a deal more on it.

'Well, you see, sir, Mrs Cardinal knew me when I was a baby, for she's close upon ninety-three. That's a great age for these parts—we ain't long-livers here. The sea

an' the aguey atween 'em finishes us off pretty brisk. Of a Sunday afternoon, arter service, I like to go in and have a dish o' tea an' a yarn with Mrs Cardinal. She knew my father an' mother, she knew my dear wife an' my pretty children, an' she knew me when I was a smart young chap. If it should please God to take the old lady afore me, I shall be like a sparrer alone on the house-top. But I shall see 'em agin, where there's no sea to drownd, an' no fevers. It was typus they took. They was all down at once, an' they was all buried within a week o' one another. My poor Meg was the first. There was six o' the pretty little dears, an' the eldest on 'em not nine. I was a young man then, an' had my sorrer hard. I thought I couldn't live out the year, but here I am a-goin' on for seventy-seven. There's on'y two things I've any great wish for now, sir. One on 'em is, that the Lord will be good to me when my time comes; an' the t'other is, that He'll give me strength to keep off the parish, an' pay for my own buryin'. It, on't cost much if on'y my relations comes to it; for I hasn't so much as a tenth cousin, so far as I know.'

'But didn't you get a reward, Mr Fenn, for saving the *Jamaica* people?'

'Not a cent, sir, as the Amerikers say. The skipper give me a glass o' grog when we got ashore. If I could have saved the cargo, it would have been different—there'd have been salvage then; but the sea an' the Spratlingsea folks wrecked that atween 'em. Hows'ever, it wasn't for money I did it, sir. I couldn't bear to see the fellers hanging on to the rigging, howling like starved dogs. You could hear 'em for all the storm. There

was one old gen'leman *promised* me a lot—a coffee-coloured, wrinkled old planter, that was the only passenger on board—leastways, him an' his baby an' the nigger nursemaid. The old feller came up to me when I got ashore, an'—"Young man," says he, "you shall never want; I'll make a gen'leman of you, I will. You've saved my life, an' you've saved my precious child. Its mother in heaven blesses you, young man, and you shall hear from me as soon as I get to London. That's my address"—an' he give me a card. I don't know whether he was only gammoning, or whether he forgot all about it; anyhow, I never heerd from him from that day to this.

'It was his Jeemaiky address he give me. I kep' the card for a bit, because I thought something might come of it, but nothing did, an' I lost the card, an' now I've forgot this many a year the old man's name an' where he lived. All I remember is that there was St Ann's in it. But it was a dear sweet little baby—long afore I was married I was soft on little uns—an' it was a pleasure (whether the old chap meant it or not) to think that its dead mother might be glad because it wasn't drowned. An' yet you might say that she'd want to have it with her. If I'd gone to heaven afore my kids, I fancy that I should ha' felt restless like till I'd got 'em all about me. When Meg an' the little uns went, how I did use to long to go arter 'em! That feeling wore off. It can't be long now afore I do go. An' now I've got another feeling. I'm half afeard that they won't know a grey, wrinkled old chap like me; or if they do, they'll be so used to the ways of the good place—living there all these years—an'

it'll all be so strange to me, that I shan't seem like a father to 'em.'

..

Spratlingsea may perhaps be a watering-place now, but when I knew it it was a mere river-mouth village, half-farming and half-fishing. The fishermen's damp cottages, and bow-windowed taverns, and wooden oyster-parks, clung like a row of funguses to the bottom of the tiny chalk cliffs on which the rest of the village stood. The flat sands (at low water ending in steaming mud) on which the fishermen fattened into natives the oyster-brood they fetched from the French coast and the Channel Islands, came up to the very threshold of the fishermen's cottages. Sand drifted into them, and dry bladder-wrack littered their doorways. At times of very high tide the water came in too, and set the furniture afloat. Outside the river-mouth, on both sides, stretched a dreary sea-wall of shingle and sedgy sand, with inky dykes behind and spongy marshes, backed in the far distance with golden cornfields and elm-fringed meadows. The high flint-tower of Spratlingsea Church, chequered like a chess-board, was the river-mouth's landmark. The few trees that rose above the greystone wall of the swollen churchyard, all stretched their bare, black, bony arms landward. Inside and outside, the church reminded you of the sea. Inside there was the marble tomb of Sir Thomas Salmon, knt., who fought against the Spanish Armada—Sir Thomas and Dame Joan, his wife, lying as large as life upon the tomb, praying horizontally, and miniatures of thirteen young Salmons kneeling along its sides; and there was a mural tablet, sacred to the

memory of Captain Daniel Plashet, of his Majesty's ship *Gryphon*, who greatly distinguished himself against the Dutch at some long-and-curly-tailed date almost obliterated by green slime. In the churchyard the cracked grey and black grave-boards, and the tottering, time-pitted gravestones, as well as those of modern date, told, in two cases, out of three, of deceased mariners. Several of the stones were crowded with the names of wrecked crews washed ashore and buried together. Beneath many a green mound slept a sailor sea-slain, with none to claim him when his corpse was contemptuously surrendered to the land. And just on the other side of the churchyard wall sat the six worthy widows, who were the recipients of Dame Lucy Dean's bequest; sewing, knitting, spinning, drowsily chatting and wrangling in the summer sunlight, that made their wall-flowers breathe forth an almost intoxicating fragrance. There were other almshouses in the parish, but since the occupants of these had no emolument except a Christmas cart-load of wood, and a trifle in summer to buy 'beans and herrings;' and since, moreover, they had to sit in the free seats, whereas the six worthy widows had a pew to themselves in church, the relicts of the deceased master mariners would not stoop to even a nodding acquaintance with their sister pensioners.

Jamaica James lived a little way out of the village, at the foot of a hill farther up the river. On the brow of the hill stood the castle, a cracked old keep patched with rusty ivy, and plumed with coarse grass and stunted wall-flowers. Inside the keep, however, and in the mossy-turfed hollows round about, wild-flowers grew

abundantly. One terraced slope was called the Vineyards, and the village tradition ran, that once upon a time, when the castle was whole, the terraces, every autumn, were black with grapes, which yielded gallons of wine. Jamaica James was very fond of smoking his pipe on the Vineyards, and I was very fond of sitting with him while he did so. We could see the ships and barques, brigs, brigantines, schooners, billy-boys, barges, and smacks, out in the blue water, and tacking up and down the river, which was richly wooded at a little distance from the sea, and James taught me to distinguish between the different rigs and flags.

‘I suppose you have been all over the world, Mr Fenn?’ I said to him one day.

‘Oh dear, no, sir. I’ve been a woyage or two to Sunderland, an’ I’ve been up the Mediterreanean, an’ twice to Quebec, an’ once to Rio. That’s all my fufrin’ sailin’s. Best part o’ my life I’ve been in Spratlingsea. A rollin’ stone gathers no moss, they say. I hain’t done much rollin’, but I hain’t gathered much moss, nayther—I’m like this place where we’re a-settin’. It used to be covered with grapes once, folks says, an’ now blackberries won’t ripen here. Well, I was a thrivin’ man once, an’ now I’m of no count to nobody. But I won’t complain—I’ve a deal more than I deserve, I know. If God ’ll keep count o’ me when my time comes, it ’on’t matter my havin’ been thought little on in Spratlingsea. Up above you ain’t valled for your money. Them as has gone before ’on’t think the less on me because I’m a poor man. When *they* wanted money, I had it to give ’em, an’ that’s a comfort.’

Mr Fenn's circumstances, of course, were too delicate a subject for me to enter on with himself, but when I had made Mrs Cardinal's acquaintance, I took the liberty of inquiring whether my old friend had not once been a very rich man. The old lady laughed. 'We hain't got no very rich folk in Spratlingsea,' she said, 'and never had, so far as I can make out, or respectable widdies like me would ha' had more left us—let alone them poor critturs in White's Alms-'uses. But James was al'ays a nice steady lad; though, mind ye, he'd run ten times the risk, when there were a proper call for it, than them as were wilder would. When he married, and as long as his poor wife and children lived, James was a thrivin' man. He'd a smack of his own, an' what with hysterin', an' sprattin', an' stone-dredgin', an' salvage, he made a good thing of it. A bolder smacksman than James, I've often heard my poor Cardinal say, never sailed out o' Spratlingsea. No weather could daunt him, an', mind ye, it was life first, an' goods afterwards with James. He'd risk his smack to take off half-a-dozen poor fellows that couldn't give him a penny, when he might ha' made a hundred pounds if he'd passed 'em by. He lived in the best house on the Strand in them days, an' it was pretty to see how neat Meg kept the house an' the children, an' how fond he were of his wife an' the little uns, an' how fond they were of him. All the little uns that could toddle used to come to church with their father an' their mother, an' when I've seed 'em all a-settin' in their pew, I've thought, "Well, if there's any happy folks in Spratlingsea, there they be." I never had no children of my own, and when I've been a-lookin' at 'em when Cardinal was at sea, an'

the wind a-blowin', they've made me feel uncommon lonely. But there, ye see, we're both stripped branches now, and there was more leaves to be took off poor James. He seemed stunned like when he lost his family, an' things went all wrong with him. An' then he went abroad for a woyage or two, an' then he come back, an' though poor James were never idle—quite the opposite, mind ye—he didn't seem to have the henigy, ye see, to pull himself up to what he'd been afore. He just turned his hand to anythin' that come first, an' was man where he used to be master. An' now, poor James, he's on'y got a bit of a row-boat that ain't much better than a sieve, an' he lives in that ramshackle pigsty at the bottom of Castle Hill, where nobody else 'ud live. Poor James, when I see him a-drivin' into the country in his little dicky-cart, with his shrimps an' what not, I can scarce believe that he's the smart young chap I remember, an' that I've nussed him many a time. He look older than me, he do, hangin' down his head that he used to carry so high, an' dressed in them patched old brown breeches, week-days an' Sundays. In his young days, if he'd had goold buttons, a navy officer couldn't ha' looked smarter than James did a-Sundays.'

Although Mrs Cardinal spoke so slightly of Jamaica James's house and boat, I esteemed it a high privilege to be allowed to enter them. The hut was of tarred weather-board—as patched and as brown as Mr Fenn's breeches—with a little shed at the side in which he kept his donkey-cart, the donkey picking up his living on the Castle Hill. There was only one room in the hut, but it was better than a palace to me, because everything in it smacked so

of the sea. The stove was a rusty boat's stove. At one end hung a tattered hammock. Oars leaned against the walls in corners, with their ends buried in little piles of shell fish. Flat fish cut up for bait were stacked like buttered toast upon the little shelves. Nets dangled from the rafters. Mr Fenn had a one-armed arm-chair, but my seat was generally a great ship's block, which he used as a chopping-block, or else a wicker lobster-pot. Here Jamaica James lived alone with his Bible and his pipe. Sometimes he got me to read the Bible to him whilst he smoked.

'My eyes ain't what they were,' he used to say. 'The words is like jammed blocks to me at times—the tackle won't run, you see, sir; but you run it out so smooth it's a pleasure to listen to ye.'

Of course, I was very proud to have my reading praised, but my great delight was to listen to the yarns with which Mr Fenn would reward me when I had finished. 'There, sir,' he said one evening, pointing to an old seal-skin cap which he wore when he went out fishing, 'd'ye see how it's bristlin'? That's because the tide's a-ebbin'. It's a sea animal, you know, sir, is the seal, an' so when the tide's turned, even the skin on it wants to go out with the water. It wants to get home like, do you see? There's times when I fare like that. I'll be sittin' still, thinkin' o' nothin' in particular, an' then all of a sudden there'll come a longin' over me to get away miles an' miles beyond the world—I couldn't say exactly where, but I feel as if them as belongs to me is a-waitin' for me there, wherever 'tis, an' a-drawin' of me like.'

Mr Fenn's boat was a good deal more seaworthy than

a sieve, and I often got a little row in it ; but he only once took me out fishing in it. He let me pull whilst he hauled up the shallow round lobster-nets, baited in the middle with slices of dry fish. We did not get many lobsters, but hauled up a superfluity of little crabs. When we had emptied all the nets, Jamaica James took up a lobster and said, 'Now look at this 'ere chap, sir,—he'd ha' been worth half-a-crown to me, if he hadn't gone an' got rid o' one of his claws. Ain't it queer, sir? When a lobster or a crab gets scared, he flings away his claws. 'Cos he's in danger, as he thinks, he makes hisself as helpless as he can. Arter all, though, a good many on us does the same when we're in trouble. An' now, if you don't mind, sir, you can give me a hand to pitch these crabs overboard. What a sight on 'em there is, but there ain't half-a-dozen sizable ones in the lot ! What you want to get you can't get, an' what you do get ain't no use. But there I am a-grumblin' agin !'

When Mr Fenn went shrimping or cockle-catching on the sandy beach outside the river's mouth, he often took me with him ; but he would not let me splash about in the water with him. 'No, sir,' he used to say, 'you've got no call to get your trousers wet, an' though they say sea-water don't give no cold, I'm not so sure o' that, for I've the rheumatiz often arter shrimpin' ; an' anyhow them as has no call to do a thing can't expect to be protected like them as has.'

So I had to stay on the dry sand, listening to the sighing of the sedge and the sad laugh of the sea-gulls, and watching the speckled sand-pipers running about like long-billed partridges, whilst the old man trudged back-

wards and forwards, pushing his shrimp-net before him. Whilst I was waiting, I sometimes picked up sea-waifs which Jamaica James would 'explain' to me when he came out of the water, hastily pulling down his tucked-up trousers over his chilled legs. I picked up once a purple cluster of cuttle-fish eggs, and asked James what they were. 'Why, where's your eyes, sir?' was his answer. 'Them's sea-grapes. God's good to all His creaturs, Chris'n or not Chris'n; an' He lets *them* grow under the sea 'cos the marmails is fond on 'em.'

When Mr Fenn hawked his shrimps and 'pin-patches' in the neighbouring inland villages, he often gave me a seat in his donkey-cart. At the end of one of these rides, on the eve of the end of my holidays, the old man put me down at the house where I was staying. 'Well, good-bye, sir,' he said. 'I feel as if I should miss the number o' my mess now you're a-goin'. You're young, and I'm old, but we've suited one another somehow. Mayhap, I shall never see ye agin, but wherever ye are, remember old Jeems's words—There's God above all. That's the best advice I can give ye—I'm no scholar—I shall miss your readin' of the Bible to me—but if I was as wise as Solomon, I don't think I could say anythin' much better than that there. If ye ever come back to Spratlingsea, I shall be glad to see ye, sir. As long as I've got a roof, you're welcome to it; an' that the Lord will keep a roof over my head till I've got the grass an' the daisies in the churchyard, debts paid, and no parish to thank, is the last wish an' earnest prayer of your old friend, Jeemaiky Jeems.'

Although the latter part of his farewell had a queerly epistolary ring, it did not strike me then in a ludicrous

light. I was ready to cry when my old friend shook my hand.

I went to Spratlingsea next summer, but it was an altered place. Mrs Cardinal was dead, and Jamaica James was in the workhouse. The winter before he had been laid up with rheumatism. Boat, donkey, and cart, all his little property, had been sold ; and at last, in spite of all his efforts, the parish claimed him.

I moped so without my old friend that the good woman with whom I lodged made interest with the parish doctor to drive me to the workhouse and let me see the old man. I consulted with her as to the most acceptable present I could take him. ‘Baccy an’ pipes,’ she suggested. Accordingly, with a parcel of these which bulged out my jacket-pocket, I mounted the doctor’s gig.

It was very doleful to see Jamaica James, in workhouse clothing, sitting listlessly doing nothing in an inland workhouse ward. ‘Thankee kindly, sir,’ he said when I gave him the packet. ‘They don’t let us smoke just when we would, but sometimes they do—why, here’s enough to last me for a twelvemonth, as I smoke now. I miss my pipe, but it’s my liberty I long for most, an’ a smell o’ the sea. There ain’t even a sight on it to be got from anywhere hereabouts. Hows’ever, it’s all for the best, I don’t doubt.’

The following summer I was again sent to Spratlingsea. I anticipated little pleasure from my visit, but what was my astonishment when Jamaica James greeted me in the village street, almost as soon as I went out into it ! He was very infirm, walking with two sticks ; but he was dressed in a very different style from the pauper clothes

of the year before, and the patched brown breeches of the year before that. 'You must come home along wi' me,' he said. 'No, not that way,' he added with a laugh, when I turned towards the Castle Hill. 'I'm a gen'leman now, sir.' He hobbled on to one of the neatest cottages in the upper village, with a pretty little flower-garden in front, and inside a comfortable matron who had just got his early dinner ready for him.

'There, sit ye down, sir, an' sup some o' my broth. Mrs Jones makes it uncommon good, an' there's more where that come from, ain't there, Mrs Jones? Sit ye down, sir, an' I'll tell ye all about it when you've had your feed.' We had a comfortable little dinner in a comfortable little room. When Mrs Jones had cleared the table, Mr Fenn took out his tobacco-pouch and a pipe. 'It's one o' yourn,' he said. 'The rest on 'em got broke, but this I kep', an' keep I will, I hope, till I can't smoke no more. When you see me in that place, you an' me little thought what was goin' to turn up, but so it was to be. Well, sir, what d'ye think? The Christmas arter there come a darkish old lady to the Dolphin here, an' when she'd had her dinner she had Dykes in,—he's the landlord, you know, sir,—“Landlord,” says she, “do you remember the *Jamaica* West Indiaman being wrecked here years ago?” “No, ma'am,” says he, “but I can tell you the story;” an' Dykes told it to the best of his knowledge. “Well,” says she, “I'm the baby that was saved, and I haven't been in England since, and now I *am* in England I've come down to see the place. Can you tell me what has become of the brave young man who saved us?” “Why, that must be poor old Jeemaiky Jeems,”

says Dykes. “He’s been in the workhouse this twelve-month.” “In the workhouse !” cried she ; “why, my nurse always told me that papa promised to make a gentleman of him.” Well, sir, I worn’t in the workhouse long arter that. Afore she went back to the West Hingies—Da Costa was her married name, but she’d lost her husband, an’ Tolano was the name of the old chap, the father, you know, sir—she’d took this cottage, an’ furnished it, an’ hired Mrs Jones to look arter me, an’ settled on me a perannivum that’s more than ever I’ll want whilst I’m livin’, an’ ’ll bury me respectable when I’m dead. She an’ her people is Jews, I reckon ; but if that ain’t Chris’n conduct, I should like to know what is. It ain’t for long I shall want her money, but I don’t feel it’s any disgrace to take it, an’ so I’m glad I’ve got it ; for I shouldn’t ha’ liked to shame my Meg an’ the little uns by goin’ to ’em straight from the workhouse. There’s God above all, an’ a good God He is, little as we desarnes it, says Jeemaiky Jeems.’

III.

A SUPPER IN A CARAVAN.



HERE are people who seem to have never done or said a foolish thing in the whole course of their unnatural lives. They are generally very proud of their exceptional prudence ; but I cannot help thinking that their young days, at any rate, must have been very prosy. An invariably 'sensible' boy or girl appears to me a dreary little monster. So long as there was no wickedness in them, there are youthful follies on which it is almost pleasant to look back—one's heart was so fresh when they were perpetrated. On account of the queer, good-natured folk to whom it introduced me, I am going to make confession of one of my youthful follies.

Behind the Mitre stables, in the old town in which I spent the best part of my boyhood—low, grey flint stables that were once the ruined Abbey's granaries—and the back gardens of a row of sleepy old houses, still called the Precincts, there is a patch of waste land, given up to

dust-heaps, battered saucepans, smashed pottery, crownless hats, mildewed odd shoes, and a rank growth of docks and stinging nettles. *Rer se*, it is not an attractive prospect, or rather retrospect; but in the days of my youth it was flooded, for a week or two before Easter, with mystically golden light. The wilderness blossomed like a Lent lily; for it was here that the proprietor of the Yellow Waggon went into spring-quarters in readiness for the coming fair.

His booth and properties were packed beneath a tarpaulin on the roof of his caravan, his two horses were put up in the Mitre stables, and for a fortnight he lived in mysterious retreat, with his great dog, his family, and his company. It was to prevent these last from becoming cheap through exposure to unpaid-for glances that he had selected this retirement behind the stables. The legend ran that he took them out for airings in the small hours, muffled up like Eastern women. At any rate, muffled or unmuffled, they were never seen abroad by day. The Yellow Waggon, therefore, was as good as a haunted house. A brooding atmosphere of secrecy in-ised its creamy sides, its red wheels daintily picked out with black, its green-shuttered, white-blinded windows, and its green-panelled, brass-knocked front-door. 'Peter Pogson, Stage Waggon,' seemed a very prosaic inscription for such a poetical vehicle to bear. We boys of the Precincts, seated on the back-garden walls, used to watch its advent with awe-hushed joy, as it came lumbering through the back gateway of the Mitre yard—its two-windowed house-front, staring full at us whilst it slowly moved along sideways, suggesting thoughts of a crab from Giant Land.

There was a giant inside, and, perhaps, he had something to do with this confused association of ideas.

It is needless to say that we often dropped from the garden-walls during Mr Pogson's absence, and endeavoured to get a glimpse at the interior of his residence ; but these enterprising efforts were rendered fruitless by the vigilance of a brindled bull-mastiff, almost as big and as fierce 'as 'a puma, tethered by a very long chain to the near forewheel. His name, at full length, was Grimaldi ; but he answered to the very appropriate sobriquet of Grim. For the most part, therefore, we had to content ourselves with the nodding acquaintance which we bragged of possessing with Mr Pogson and Mrs and Miss P. when they took in turns their walks abroad. We were all good customers at fair time, and, in a condescending kind of way, they were very affable to us. Under these circumstances, I was a proud and happy man when I was invited to take a pipe and potluck *ad libitum* in the Yellow Waggon. The fact that my manhood was taken for granted in the proffer of the pipe, of course, had much to do with my delight, but the mysterious exclusiveness of the mansion to which I had at last obtained the *entrée*, had far more. Outside the circle of his co-professionals, no one, as far as I was aware, had ever received such an invitation from the proprietor of the Yellow Waggon before. The circumstance that he never found it convenient to repay the small loan which had secured me this striking proof of his favour was a mere dust-pinch in the other scale. In those salad days I would gladly have lost ten times as much, if I had had it to lose, to get on terms of intimacy with 'professionals.' Such familiarity seemed a far manlier

phase of 'fastness' than furtive smoking of penny pick-wicks.

In the bygone time, when Mr Pogson figured as a clown, he had been known amongst printers of playbills and the general public as Pablo Fernandez; but on his retirement from dramatically-performing public life—in consequence of a broken thigh, so badly set, that, in his own professionally facetious phrase (in allusion to his waddling gait) he was 'goosed' for life—a compromise was made between his private and public names, and he was thenceforth known, both in 'the profession' and amongst the *profanum vulgus*, as 'Pab Pog.' Almost the only trace of his old calling which he retained was a tendency to turn in his toes and puff out his pockets. He never stooped to anything so trivial as 'Here we are agin,' or 'Fine day to-morrer. How was yer?' Such rare facetiæ as he now indulged in were almost wholly confined to private life. When he thumped the drum, and blew down into the Pan's pipes, in front of his own entertainment, he would, however, sometimes condescend to vary his monotonous music, and 'walk up, walk up,' with confidential assurances to the young women in the *al fresco* crowd, that 'their young men was hall hinside, and 'ud cut their throats if their gals didn't cut in harter 'em;' or by informing some aged Benedict that 'he'd jist seen 'is hold ooman a-kissin' of a smart young hoffer.' Managerial responsibilities had not sharpened Pab Pog's wit. Respectability was the *rôle* which he affected now. He 'dressed the part' in a drab hat with a mourning band, and broad, up-turned, green-lined brims; sandy whiskers, clubbed in a blunt V on his once closely-shaven cheeks

and chin ; a jet-brooched, crumpled white neckcloth, black coat and waistcoat, baggy cord breeches, with a bunch of greasy keys and seals dangling at the end of a broad strip of watered black silk ribbon, and a pair of big boots, very deep as to the tanned tops, very long as to the striped flaps, very crinkly as to the legs, and very broad as to the toes. The general effect of this get-up was a medley of the Ethiopian serenader, the undertaker's man, and the horse-dealer ; but Pab was of opinion that his responsible appearance was far more efficacious in drawing houses than even the coloured cartoon hoisted at fair-time above his caravan—an illustrated canvas sheet about the size of a brig's mainsail. When, however, he had been thumping, piping, joking, pulling out his watch, and rattling his money, fruitlessly, for ten minutes at a stretch, if his daughter made her appearance on the little platform, in her abbreviated muslins and wreath of red-calico roses, to give one clink of her castanets, one spin of her tambourine, one twirl round on her red-rosetted toe, and then to bound in again as if she had invisible wings, or her white shoes were soled with india-rubber, the enamoured youth of our old town would clatter up the show steps like a storming-party.

I must confess that it was pretty Polly Pogson—such was her name in the boots and stockings of domestic life, although in her fleshings she was known as ‘Mademoiselle Zephyrine, Beneficent Queen of the Fairies,’—it was Polly, I say, that constituted in my eyes the crown of my bliss in getting admitted to the Yellow Waggon on the easy footing of a family friend. Mrs Pogson—a fat, slovenly, good-natured woman, with a double-chin, and

always one, sometimes both, stockings down at heel, who took the coppers, and had an inimitable knack of frying sausages and making welsh-rabbit, but who, when I knew her, was not otherwise remarkable—had been a columbine in her youth, and proudly fostered the hope that the Zephyrine, ere long, would *almost* equal her mother's performances in 'legitimate business' in that line—performances which Mrs P. believed to rank amongst the most fondly cherished traditions of the stage.

But at the time of which I write, Mademoiselle Zephyrine was the only female member of her father's company, It had two male members: one, 'The Original Giant Bluebeard Blunderbore;' and the other, 'The World-Famous Gentlemanly Dwarf, Signor Jacopo, who was cradled in a Silver-Gilt Pint Pot, and now appearing in his celebrated tragic-comic part of Jack the Giant Killer, as performed before all the Crowned Heads of Europe, the President of America, the Great Mogul, and the Sultan of Timbuctoo.' The Giant, the Dwarf, and the Fairy Queen were depicted on the mainsail, in one of the most impressive tableaux of the piece in which they performed—the Giant a good deal larger than life, the Dwarf a good deal smaller than life, but the Fairy Queen, as all her admirers declared, with unanimous indignation, not half so beautiful as life. Long before the days of the burlesque-writers, playwrights took liberties with mythology. Didn't the Attic tragedians do so? At any rate Pab Pog's poet had done so in the one act (and one scene) drama, which, it was almost otiose for the manager to intimate, had been 'hegspressly written for his hew-neek gal-láxy of hunrivilled talent.'

'The Giant, the Dwarf, and the Genius: Bluebeard Blunderbore, Brave Jack the Gentleman, and the Beautiful and Beneficent Queen of the Fairies,' was the long title of the brief tragi-comedy. A flat rock in the middle of the stage, and a flatter wood at the back, constituted the scenery. Grunts like the gasps of an asthmatic elephant, and steps like the thuds of a pile-driver, are heard behind the wood. Bluebeard Blunderbore enters, and leans upon his club. A beard of blue tow reaches to his waist in front, blue locks hang down to his waist behind, blue moustaches curl like buffalo-horns beneath his drooping nose. His garbardine is sulphur-hued, and girt with a broad blue belt that holds a gore-stained scimitar. His turban is crimson, and studded with a crescent of glittering Bristol stones. His slippers are crimson likewise, turned up at the toes like skates, and wooden-soled like clogs. 'I have lost my voice,' he pipes (a fact ingeniously worked in by the poet). 'For ten long nights I have not tasted human blood. I am a-weary. Let me repose.' He lies down in front of the rock, licks his blood-streaked weapon with the frantic tongue of famine, and then falls sound asleep. Jack the Giant-killer rises from behind the rock, in a flaxen wig, a court-suit of black-cotton velvet, dress sword, silk stockings, buckled shoes, a cocked hat under his arm, and green glasses on his cocked-nose. 'Mine eyes are dim,' he murmurs mournfully. 'Alas, my vision is impaired' (another fact ingeniously worked in by the poet). 'Tears for the sufferings of my race have done the deed. 'Tis well. I see not now how grievously they suffer. Yea, heaven is ke-yind, when

most it doth seem harsh. The monster haunts this spot. Could I but find him !' He draws his rapier, and prods vigorously at vacancy. At last he stumbles over the giant's feet, and shouts exultingly, 'Ha ! *have* I found him ? Have at thee, fiend !' The giant rises drowsily, muttering, 'I smell the blood of an Englishman.' When fully awake, he swings his club with one hand, and mows away with the scimitar in the other ; always carefully avoiding Jack, who keeps on pricking away at the giant's legs in the most valorous style. But presently Jack lowers his point, and sighs sadly, 'Once more the dimness ! The hour has not yet struck. But boast not, Blunderbore—the clock is warning now. *Au revoir*—brute !' Jack runs round and round the rock, with the giant after him. Jack's foot trips and the club is just descending on his head, when the wood suddenly opens, and the Queen of the Fairies, in white and blue, rose-red and flesh pink, bounds upon the stage, waves her flower-wreathed, streamered wand, spins round upon her right toe, curtsies her acknowledgments of the applause which greets her *pirouette*, and then inquires, in a tone of arch solemnity, 'Bluebeard, where is thy—WIFE ?' The giant is conscience-stricken, he lets fall his weapon, and Jack, briskly getting up, slays him with the utmost facility. Jack and the Fairy Queen then dance round the prostrate corpse together, plucking its beard as they go by. The Fairy Queen executes a protracted *pas seul*, and when she has complied with the usual *encore*—waited for, if it does not come at once—the curtain falls upon her Elfin Majesty standing upon one leg on Bluebeard Blunderbore's

shoulder, whilst Jack strikes an attitude at his feet, ejaculating, as he takes off his green spectacles, ' *Their* occupation 's gone. I thank thee, hCaven !'

Such is my cold middle-aged remembrance of the thrilling drama at which, *calidâ juventâ*, I used to assist as long as my coppers lasted. At the close of each performance Pab Pog looked in to announce, ' Now, ladies and gen'l-men, and nobility o' the wicinity, them as stays pays agin. We takes yer money, and you takes yer choice.' My choice was always to stay whilst my money held out—not nearly so much on account of Blunderbore and the Giant-killer, as to feast my eyes upon the bounding Zephyrine, and applaud her to the echo. The piece seemed very flat until the flat wood split in two—an effect in which there was occasionally a hitch ; since the Fairy Queen had to be her own scene-shifter, and in spite, or rather because of, her magic wand, sometimes made a mull of the business.

Such being my loyalty to the Pogson family, I thought myself cruelly ill-used when I first presented myself at the door of the Yellow Waggon. I had spruced myself up for the momentous occasion, carefully brushed off the dust which I had contracted in scrambling over the garden wall, and marched boldly up the doorsteps. Grim, impressed by my unwonted confidence, had contented himself with a series of still-suspicious growls. Everything as yet had gone well. Mrs Pogson put her papered head out, when I knocked. ' Well, sir, the master ain't at home,' was her reply, when I had explained my business ; and then, holding the door barely a-jar, she engaged in a *sotto voce* conference with her daughter. ' He says your

father have a-ast him; Poll,' I heard her whisper. 'Drat the boy! He can't come in now—we're all in a mess, and Bluebeard is a-shavin'.'

'Oh, is it on'y one o' them boys?' was Zephyrine's indifferent response, and then she made some further satirical remark, as I could judge from the giggle in which mother and daughter joined.

Before she had composed her countenance, Mrs Pogson again put out her head. 'P'raps you'd better call when Mr P.'s in, young gentleman,' she said. (Zephyrine's satire had indisposed her to honour me again with a grown-up 'sir.') 'He've jest gone up the Mitre yard. If you want him, you're pretty sure to find him in the tap.'

But I was in too Naaman-like a mood to go in search of the showman; I turned and went away in a rage, almost tumbling off the steep little ladder; and, as soon as I reached the ground, Grimaldi made a rush at me, as having been detected in the imposture which he had all along suspected.

The next time I saw Pab Pog I informed him somewhat sulkily of my fruitless visit to his residence. He had plainly forgotten all about his invitation, and did not seem very eager to renew it. His little account with me being still unsettled, however, he compromised matters by remarking, 'Well, you see, sir, it would be hill-convenient to us purfeshnuls if strangers was to come droppin' in permiskus like. But if you'll take a snack with us to-morrer night, at nine sharp, we shall be proud o' the hhonour o' yer company. You'd better wait till you see me a-comin' back wi' the supper-beer, for the dawg's safe to bite at night. I can't make out 'ow 'twas he come to

let yer go by as you did. But you're sure your mar won't objec', sir? I'm a respectable man, and don't want to make no words in the wicinity.'

It was galling that the man who had so recently invited me to take a pipe and pot-luck, should talk as if he thought me under 'absolute petticoat government. But there is a bitter to every, sweet ; and it was very sweet to think that I might sit by Zephyrine's side at supper, and actually see that ethereal creature eat and drink. What did she feed on? Honey-dew? The giant and the dwarf, too,—what were their unearthly viands?

Next evening, the instant Pab Pog issued from the Mitre yard, I was at his side. He carried a foaming pot of porter in each hand, and a can of the same beverage slung upon his arm like a lady's reticule. To my offer to ease him of a portion of his load, he replied, in a tone of lofty offence, 'Sir, I may 'ave my hessen-tristies, but I knows purliteness. Hif I've a mind to fetch my own beer, what's that to you or hanybody helse? In our spear o' life, we don't ax a cove to come and see us to make a pots on 'im. I thought a young gen'lemen ood 'a larnt more manners.' When we reached the waggon, Grimaldi could not help giving one short growl, which plainly said, 'Well, I hope it *is* all right now, but I can't be sure ;' and then the door opened, and I entered my Cave of Mystery and Bower of Bliss, dimly illuminated by the fire-light and one tallow candle in a candlestick that looked, from its size, as if it must belong to Signor Jacopo, although there were no signs of 'silver-gilt' splendour in its unburnished brass. The celestial Zephyrine, attired in a high-necked brown merino frock,

was laying black-handled knives and forks on a tablecloth curiously mottled with grease and egg and coffee-stains, and stamped with stale arcs and circles that told of overflowing pots of beer. This was somewhat disappointing, but the reception she granted me was worse. She gave me a bland, motherly smile, and bade me find a seat, just as if I had been a bashful little boy, instead of a young gentleman bent on seeing life, and invited to blow a cloud with her professional papa. Mrs Pogson—her face still unwashed, but her hair for once out of paper, and arranged in ringlets that looked like whelks just twisted from the shell—was busy at the stove, and nodded her welcome over her fat shoulder. A little frying-pan full of frizzling sausages stood upon the stove, almost pushing off a black saucepan and a pile of willow-pattern plates that were warming there. In front hung a Dutch oven, whence issued a savoury scent of toasting cheese.

Whilst the final preparations for supper were being made, Pab Pog, that he might be wanting in no duty of politeness, explained to me his domesticities. 'That's where me and the missis sleeps,' he said, pointing to a box-bed at one end of the waggon; 'and that's Poll's crib,' pointing to an alcove at the other, curtained with pink glazed calico; 'an' that's where we keeps our stars,' jerking his thumb towards a green-baize curtain which hung along one side, and which kept on bulging out and then suddenly collapsing in a very perplexing fashion.

'The gentlemen is dressing, and will eftsoons appear,' Zephyrine majestically interpreted.

A corner of the curtain was lifted up, and Signor

Jacopo made his appearance. The little man rubbed his big hands and bowed politely to the ladies, nodded familiarly to his manager, and overwhelmed me with the condescension of his greeting, 'You do me pwoud, sah. I have obsairved with gweat satisfaction you-ah youthful pwedilixion faw the dwayma.' The Signor evidently prided himself on his swellish lisp and manners, and was regarded by all his caravan-mates as an infallible authority on all points of etiquette. He was a very stylish little gentleman. He had brushed his black locks up into a cock's-comb curl on the top of his big head. He wore a silk-faced pilot-jacket, a double-breasted white waistcoat, a frill to his shirt, and a gilt chain crossed upon it. He sported a massive gold signet-ring also. His green spectacles were discarded, but he was for ever raising and dropping a gilt eye-glass in the most lackadaisical fashion, perking his head on one side at the same time like a bird's.

The giant's entrance did not create a tithe of the sensation which the dwarf's had caused. In a brown coat and waistcoat, corduroy breeches, and grey stockings, all too small for him, he looked far more like an overgrown Smike than a ferocious Blunderbore. His long nose drooped and his shaky knees stood out like a cab-horse's on the stand. His narrow shoulders stooped. Jack the Giant-killer had a bushy pair of whiskers, but Bluebeard had shaved himself as clean as a scraped pig. The dwarf had a bass voice, but the giant piped in the weakest treble. His little head, without the wig, did not look much bigger or hairier than a Dutch cheese. He had a weak mouth, and mild eyes that pleaded for pity

and protection in a put-upon, childish way that seemed absurdly droll in such a mountain of a man. I soon found that the giant was the smallest personage in the establishment. 'Why, Long Sam, what a time you've been!' said Pab Pog. 'Keepin' the comp'ny waitin'. That ain't hettikit, is it, Seenur?'

I could scarcely credit my ears. 'Long Sam' the name of the dread Blunderbore in private life!

'Please, I was a-washin' my hands,' answered the giant submissively, and slowly subsided into his seat, as if he was letting himself down through a hole in the floor, but really folding up his long legs like a foot-rule.

'Don't scold him, Pog,' said the dwarf compassionately. 'The ladies and you-ah young fwiend must weceive my apologies. Mr Sam ke-yindly blacked my boots faw me. He is a good fellah.'

The giant looked up gratefully, and the dwarf nodded back as who should say, 'Conduct yourself as you have hitherto done, and you may rely upon my continued protection.'

I should have liked the Signor, had it not been for two things—the obtrusively paternal manner in which, as he imagined, he adapted himself to my capacity by turning the conversation, *apropos* of nothing, on lollipops and marbles; and the marked attentions which, in a Grand Sultan kind of way, he paid to Zephyrine. It was pleasant to see that she was amused by these attentions, but then it was not so pleasant to see that she was also proud of them. She sat next the Signor; and when I saw her give him a playful tap when he had insisted on helping her to mustard (it circulated in a burly little

Dutch burgomaster, with a brown clay body and a pewter hat), I half repented that I had spent such fruitless pains on my 'Ode to Zephyrina's Hand'—my rhymes for which had run out when I had got no farther than—

'Tinkling on the tambourine,
Taper-fingered Zephyrine,
By enamoured eyes is seen.

'White as milk in any dairy,
Mightier far than bear-paw hairy,
Though as small as hand of fairy.'

The Signor was the recognised wit as well as *arbiter elegantiarum* of the company. If he asked for salt, Zephyrine giggled, and Mrs Pogson called out, 'Oh, you droll crittur,' with tears in her eyes. Pab Pog, who had once been a wit himself,—and had got his living by it, too—could not always see the point of Signor Jacopo's jests, but he was as much impressed as his wife and daughter by Signor Jacopo's gentility. The little man, shovelling mashed potatoes into his mouth with his knife, as if he was loading a cart, enlivened our symposium with a record of his romantic adventures in foreign courts. He had dined with empresses, danced with queens, duchesses had fallen desperately in love with him. It was queer at first to note the implicit faith which his comrades put in these wild legends, and queerer still to see how completely, through dint of frequent repetition, the Signor had convinced himself of the historical nature of his mythology. But the atmosphere of credulity soon told upon me. I felt proud of getting into such distinguished company. Professional people had, no doubt, a remarkable gift of adapting themselves

to circumstances. They were true gentlemen, who didn't give themselves stuck-up airs, and sneer at sausage because they once feasted to satiety on venison. Who was I, to doubt that the Signor had eaten off gold plate and quaffed Tokay, because he and even the adorable Zephyrine put their knives in their mouths?—Pab Pog half swallowed *his*, as if, in spite of his respectability, he was practising a conjuror's trick; the giant hungrily picked his teeth with his fork, and Mrs Pogson harpooned sausages out of the frying-pan with hers, and held them up at its point to public outcry, with the playful advice, 'Now, don't shout all at once, and don't say no if you'd rayther not?'

'A remarkable little man, ain't he?' said Pab Pog, in a confidential aside, confidentially adding, 'I hassure *you* there ain't many—to say nuffink of a young gen'leman o' *your* age—as I'd grant the privilege to meet him in the spear o' private life. You mustn't mind his chaffin' yer a bit. You see he thinks it was a bit o' liberty o' my part to ax yer to meet him. Chaff! Law bless yer, there's lots as 'ud think it a hhonour far above their desarts to get a word—let alone a joke—from Seenur Jacopo in a convivial sarkle like this 'ere. He's known far and wide in the purfeshn as Gen'leman Jack. They *do* say he might set in the House o' Lords if he chose to claim his rights. But he's hessentric, he's hessentric, is the Seenur. Anyhow, it won't do for me to tub 'im the wrong way—for he draws uncommon, and could make 'is hown terms helsewheres. There's lots 'ud be glad to snap 'im hup if hi was fool enough to let 'im slip through my fingers. You see he's so hairistocratic. When he

takes a swig out o' the pewter, he vipes his mouth on the table-cloth, afore he drinks, an' then agin afore he sarkilates the fluid.'

I was not disposed to dispute the Signor's aristocratic claim, but my loyalty to Zephyrine compelled me to question his exclusive attractiveness. I ventured to suggest that Mr Pogson's lovely daughter had more to do with the popularity of his entertainment than even his gentlemanly dwarf. 'Oh yes,' was the sire's cold acknowledgment of my compliment; 'Poll's well enough for a gal, but gals is cheap.'

This was unendurable, and so, to aggravate him in return, I, as an experienced member of the play-going public, assured Mr Pogson that in popular estimation the giant was a far more impressive character than the dwarf.

'Giants,' he snorted contemptuously. 'Well, if you could get a giant as *was* a giant, warranted sound in wind and limb, an' with some sort o' 'eadpiece on 'is ugly shoulders, he might be a bit of a ketch. But mostly they runs to legs, and precious bad legs, too. They hain't a mite o' *study* in 'em. It ain't much Long Sam's got to say, but it took him a heverlastin' long while to learn. They've no inwentine genius nayther. Now the Seenur there can gag away as if he'd been in my line. Besides, you see, you can make up a giant if yer ain't got one, but yer can't cut down a dwarf. Kids' is no go. They're sharp enough for most dodges, but, you see, yer can't give 'em the hold look about the heyes.'

Pab Pog, having thus spoken, suddenly remembered, I suppose, that he was not conversing with a co-professional, and abruptly edged away his chair to join in a

discussion in which the Signor and Mrs and Miss P. were engaged, as to the date of the Pig-faced Lady's first appearance.

'Excuse me, my deah Ma'm'selle,' remarked the gallant dwarf to Zephyrine. 'You ah fah too young an' chaw-min' to know anything about the mattah. Faw my own paht,' he went on, 'it is a mystewy to me how such monstwosities can consent to exhibit themselves. It shows sad depwavity of taste, both on theyah paht and that of the Bwtish public.'

I was left to amuse myself with Long Sam, who was busy over a plateful of Welsh-rabbit, which Mrs Pogson had found time to push him in an interval between cooking and conversation. The giant was silently enjoying it. 'You see, I know the quanticums,' our plump hostess was fond of vaunting when complimented on her culinary skill.

'A pleasant evening, sir,' I diffidently observed to my big neighbour.

'Please, I'm a-eatin',' he softly answered, with a side-long glance of mild reproach. Of course, after that I could only hold my tongue. But presently the giant, who had been for some time chiselling his plate with his knife-point, looked up. 'I've a-done now—what is it?'

The abrupt inquiry was mildly put, but still it was startling. I could only repeat, still more diffidently, my previous brilliant observation.

'A pleasant evening?' whispered the giant after me. 'I'm sure I'm glad you likes it. But you're young. Not but what the cheese was good; *and* the sassengers. Taties, p'raps, was so-so—they'd got burnt in the bilin'.

Mrs P.'s a good cook, but the stove ain't ekal to her abilities. They *might* ha' skinked my beer, but I'm used to that. I likes my beer, though, with a 'ead on it. Young gen'leman, don't you never git spoony on a gal. I was thought a deal more on till I got sweet on Polly. Folks 'as their feelins, though they is seven foot four. You looks as if you'd run up. Don't you never run to my size, and don't you go for to be sich a hass as to git spooney on a gal. I never said nuffink, but *she* see it, and Mrs P. see it, and Pab Pog see it, and the Sig-nore see it, and so they chaffed me. The Sig-nore's sweet on Poll himself—not as he's got a bit better chance—but he's different. He's a-dined wi' hempresses—leastways, so he says. He ain't a bad chap, though, if he wasn't allus a-braggin' so about 'is great folk ; but then, you see, he's naterally of a swell sort. Anyhow, he allus takes my part. Not as I've much to complain on in the way o' grub, an' that. Pog don't grudge a cove 'is keep, and Poll and Mrs P. was werry kind when I was laid up wi' the rheumatiz, and thought I should ha' 'ad to go into the workus. I couldn't hact no more nor Pog could jump through a flap wi' his game leg. But then, you see, they don't regard one's feelins. Now, that the Sig-nore allus do. Sez he to me one day, "Sam," sez he, in his perlite way, "don't let's 'ave no words. You're spooney on Miss P. Don't you go on a-bein' spooney. She's the hempress o' my 'eart—me that 'as kissed live hempresses—but not wi' my consent shall she part old friends. You an' I, Sam," sez he, "'as got on like a 'ouse afire, an' it shan't be my fault if our friendship's squenched. You've got no fault, Sam"—so he was pleased to say—

"'cept that you're too good-natured, an' snore a bit too loud till I wakes yer hup wi' the walkin'-stick." (My bunk's a-top o' his, you see, an' he takes the stick to bed wi' him, an' stirs me hup through the battens, when I begins to beller.) "So, lookee here, Sam. I don't want to hurt yer in mind, body, nor hestate. But I might be *forced* to, if you was to think hany more about my Polly." She ain't 'is Polly, and never will be nayther; but we've got on werry smooth since that. Still it ain't pleasant to be hordered about by the Sig-nore, though he do respect one's feelins—'cept when him and the gal is a-pinchin' an' a-pokin' of me in the show. Don't you never run to my size.'

I had, then, another rival; but he, like myself, was slighted, and so my heart softened towards him. I felt very slighted just at that moment. The Signor was smoking a cigar, Pab Pog was puffing away at a highly respectable churchwarden clay; but, though I had been expressly invited to take a pipe, no pipe had been offered me. 'Don't *you* smoke, Mr —— Mr —— Blunderbore?' I sympathetically inquired.

'Oh, I shall 'ave my rig'lation pipe bimeby—p'raps two, as it's a noliday. It's on'y fine gen'lemen as 'asn't hovergrewed theirselves as is priwileged to smoke Hawannahs. An' my name ain't Blunderbore, nor more nor he's a Sig-nore."

The giant thought that he had made a joke, and, as I saw I was expected to laugh, I laughed accordingly.

Long Sam went on in temporarily raised spirits:—
'Ikey Jacob's 'is right name, an' Sam'l Cole is mine. P'raps my folks was as good as 'is, though I'm not for

heverlastin' blowin' about 'em. I wouldn't a-said a word agin my hold dad, if 'e'd on'y a-strung my neck as soon as I was born. I used to like it at fust, bein' a-showed about, but I'm sick an' tired on it now. You see, I've no wariety. I'm a-made little on in the show, an' I'm a-made little on in 'ere. Afore I come to Pog, I'd a cage to myself like the wild beastes. But now the Sig-nore's heverybody. If it wasn't for the gal, I'd cut. Don't you never git sweet upon a gal, an' don't you run to my size. It'll cost such a sight for your cawfin if ye're a swell, an' if ye've got to arn yer livin', yer can on'y do it in this 'ere heathenish sort o' way. If I was to try to do a hhonest stroke o' work, I should 'ave all the boys a-mobbing of me ; an' I hain't been hinside a church, not since I was so 'igh. I wish I was dead, I do. Eatin' an' drinkin' 's my on'y comfort. I likes a pipe, too, but Pog 'lowances me, 'cos he says smokin' ain't good for my constitooshun.'

Just then, however, Pog pushed the tobacco-jar over to his retainer, and invited him to charge. Long Sam clutched it like a child pouncing on a sugarstick, and drawing an old meerschaum out of his breast-pocket, rammed and crammed it with shag to the utmost limit of its capacity. When he had lighted the black wig that curled high above the turban of his mahogany-cheeked Turk's head, and Zephyrine, moreover, had handed him a tumblerful of rum-and-water, the giant forgave the hard fate that had made him seven foot four, and puffed and sipped in silent complacency. By way of jocose compliment, I was then at last invited to take a pipe, but cruel Zephyrine indignantly negatived the proposal, with uncomplimentary maternal anxiety for my welfare.

‘For shame, par,’ he exclaimed. ‘What would his mar say? You wouldn’t like to make the boy sick!’

There was some almost equally unpleasant controversy, too, as to whether I was to be allowed to touch the spirits and water. The Signor suggested that Mrs Pogson might possibly have some ‘waspbewy vinegah aw ginjah wine.’ He had not an intimate acquaintance with the ‘highly respectable middle classes,’ but those, he believed, were the ‘festive bevewages of the children of the uppah sarcles.’

Pab Pog, however, cut this controversy short by shouting, ‘Hang it all, I ’on’t have a friend stinted at my table. A thimbleful o’ grog can’t hurt nobody.’

‘*That* it don’t,’ chimed in Mrs P., availing herself of the opportunity to tilt the bottle once more into her own tumbler.

‘Hettiket be blowed,’ went on Pab Pog. ‘Ain’t we a-jollifyin’? Dror hup, gen’lemen half, an’ let’s be conwivial. Scenur, you propose a sentiment, an’ then Long Sam ’ll sing us a song. He hain’t sich a bad ’woice, hif e’d hon’y got a bit more on it.’

The Signor mounted on his chair. He smirked and hemmed, and ran his fingers through his Brutus curl. Then he pulled down his wristbands, and leaning on the table with the bridges he had made of the thumb and forefinger of each hand, he once more cleared his voice, and thus delivered himself, ‘Ladies *and* gentlemen—my esteemed Mrs Pogson, lovely Miss Pogson, my young fwiend, if he will pahmit me so to call him, whose name at pwesent I do not pweecesely wecollect, fwiend Pog, whom I have known for many wolling yeahs, and you, my honest Sam, whō shaah my pwofessional labaws and my pwivate bedwoom

—it is needless, I am shaw, faw me, to say how pwoud I am to be made the spokesman off this united company. I may have moved in fah diffewent scenes, but I have a haht that thwobs at the sight of lovely woman, innocent youth, and manly couwage, wherevah I may meet them. Nachaw may have given me pahsonal advantages which she has ewuelly denied to some. Fawtune may have bestowed on me social advantages which othahs have not been pwivileged to enjy, but my haht is in its wight place, and I hahtily thank you, my fwiends, faw all you-ah past ke-yindness and you-ah pwesent ke-yind weception. I call upon you now to chawge you-ah glasses—at pwesent we have no wine, but wum will do as well—and dwink with me this sentiment, “May the pwesent be the most misewable moment of ou-ah lives !”

‘Didn’t I tell yer the Seenur ’ad the gift of the gab uncommon?’ whispered Pab Pog, as he made the glasses dance on the thumped table. ‘Hain’t he a style, too? There ain’t many o’ them Parliament chaps could ’old a candle to him, I reckon.’

When Long Sam had sung his song like a mammoth piping bullfinch, and Zephyrine had danced the sailors’ hornpipe, as well as the brown merino and cramped space would permit, Mr Pogson, who was growing sentimental, exclaimed, ‘Now this is what I call a hintellectual way o’ spendin’ a hevenin’. I’m a respectable man, an’ likes to enjy myself in a respectable manner. I’ve took a fancy to this ’ere wicinity. ’Cept at fair times, it’s so precious sleepy. The hold churches and things is soothin’ to a man as knocks about the world as I does. I likes to lay up ’ere afore Heaster. When I takes my walks abroad I

sees the flowers hall a-blowin', hall a-growin', in the gardings, an' I 'ears the birds a-singin', an' I thinks o' when I was a by. My mother, poor old gal, used to like to 'ear the birds a-singin'. Her an' me used to tramp out to Hilford of a Sunday a-purpose. It's nice, too, not to 'ave to do nuffink, jist as hif yer was a se-vell, when yer thinks on it at bed-time. An' yet I can't 'elp lookin' forward to the fair. 'Ereabouts the beaks an' parsons is reasonable gen'lemen, an' doesn't 'ound a hhonest man about as hif 'e was a wagabone. They does in some places. It's fair flyin' in the face o' Providence, sez I. What was janiuses like the Seenur made for if they wasn't to be showed? But come, young gen'leman, it's time you was a-bed. Say good-night to the comp'ny, an' I'll see yer past the dawg.'

Whilst I was lingering at the door, shaking hands with the lovely Zephyrine, and thanking her for about the twentieth time for the delightful evening I had spent in the Yellow Waggon, Long Sam stooped over me like a giraffe, to whisper in my ear once more, 'You're young. Don't you never run to my size, and don't you go for to be sich a hass as to git spooney on a gal.'

IV.

MY LONELY LANDLADY.

IN a dull side-street, running into a dusty omnibus route fringed with stunted trees—as much like country trees as London mannikins are like fresh-coloured farmers—in one of the southern suburbs of our great, sprawling, dusky city, a row of houses which, I think, was called Talavera Terrace, used to stand. It has vanished now. It consisted of five houses only, and one of the many railways that have gone tramping about in metropolitan Surrey and Kent like heavy-booted dragoons in a china shop, has crushed Talavera Terrace out of existence. It was a very shabby terrace. Spear-heads had been knocked off the almost paintless palisades of its little front gardens—some of the rails had been wrenched out of their sockets, and carried off bodily. The dried-up, dwarfish laurustinus and lignum-vitæ bushes that stuck up in the middle of the tiny, worn-out-mat-like grass plats in the little front gardens looked like chimney-sweeps' brushes protruded

from subterranean flues. All the yellow had long ago been washed out of the little gravel-paths. A ragged reach or two of shrivelled, yellow box showed that the little grass plats had once been bordered with little flower-beds, but when I knew them they were almost as hard as a baked turnpike road, and grew nothing but a scanty crop of very poor groundsel and a few clumps of pallid flags that looked as succulent as strips of tin, and whose last purple iris had burst its curl-paper sheath in a forgotten spring.

The long, narrow back gardens were as dreary. Dirty, draggle-tailed fowls dolorously clucked, and crowed, and scratched in one or two of them, making great hollows in the ground, and crouching in them as if they were so miserable that they would be thankful if any one would shovel the thrown-up earth over them and bury them alive. The back-parlour window of each house looked out on a parched or sloppy quadrangular desert, with a rotten, staggering linen-post at each corner, linked together with black, knotted clothes-lines,—and, beyond that, on a jungle of rank weeds, coarse grass, and dankly mouldering paling and trellis-work, haunted by slugs, snails, frogs, and toads. Now and then a vicious-eyed rat slunk through the unwholesome jumble.

A slimy-looking canal stagnated outside the bottom fence of the gardens. Young roughs, in the bathing season, could be seen through the gaps in the tumble-down timbers, running naked as savages along the dingy towing-path. When not seen, they could be heard war-whooping like wild Indians. At all seasons they pitched stones, oystershells, and brickbats into the gardens,

mounted on the bottom fence and refused to be dislodged, sometimes made raids into the gardens, and carried off the fowls, and the linen from the lines.

'God Almighty first planted a garden,' says Bacon; 'and indeed it is the purest of human pleasures.' But anything less suggestive of the cool, fragrant privacy of such a garden as Bacon had in his eye than the Talavera Terrace back wildernesses it would be difficult to imagine. A few distorted, old apple and pear trees managed to put out a meagre spray or two of pink and white and snowy blossom, but a few green, sour, small marbles were the only fruit they bore. One or two laburnum-trees dangled thin clusters of bloom that seemed wilted when it first opened. Tall monkshood that never flowered, and purple-blossomed thistles even taller, shot up through the rough undergrowth. A few sunflowers blazed broadly over it, and a few hardy roses were half-smothered in it—their pale or flushed petals peering through the flood of weeds like faces of the drowning.

The houses were quite in keeping with their gardens. No wonder 'To let' bills remained in their windows until the announcement became almost illegible from dust and cobwebs. Only persons who were as seedy as itself took houses in Talavera Terrace. Happy, hopeful young couples, in search of their first home, were sometimes tricked into visiting it by its owner's advertisements of 'commodious old-fashioned houses at a low rent, with front lawns, and large gardens at the back, well stocked with old fruit-trees;' but as soon as the young house-hunters set eyes on the commodious residences, they fled. They paid no heed to the notification, 'Key at

No. 1.' Their only wish was to get away as quickly as possible from a place so depressing that it took the zest out of their house-hunting for the rest of the day.

The grime had never been rubbed off the bricks of the Terrace houses, or their mortar-lines fresh pointed. The paint must have been last renewed upon their wood-work at about the time when the last flag blossomed in their front gardens. Even in the tenanted houses panes remained cracked for a long time in the blistered window-frames, and shattered panes were patched up with whity-brown paper, and varicose veins and podgy bosses of putty; and a dangling fragment of frayed cord here and there showed that a sash-weight had fallen in its case, and that the tenants were obliged to put up with the inconvenience because they could not afford to send for the carpenter. The houses let so uncertainly, and brought in so little when they were let, that the only repairs the landlord would undertake were those that were just sufficient to keep the houses from tumbling down into a heap of rubbish. Ever and anon they were advertised for sale, but no one could be got to buy. It was a lucky thing for the owner when the railway put down its heavy foot upon them, and crushed them and their dismal gardens out of sight.

The keys of the houses to let were left at No. 1, because the tenant of No. 1 was the oldest inhabitant of the Terrace. The tenants of the other houses had come and gone, like chips floated into a nook in a river-bank and then floated out again. They were a very miscellaneous lot, of many nationalities, and for the most part of mysterious callings. Some of them made moonlight

flittings. It was no rare thing for water to be cut off in Talavera Terrace. A new tenant in it was often dunned for arrears of parish rates left unpaid by his predecessor.

For years, however, Mrs Dennis had somehow managed to live on at No. 1. She was often behind-hand with her rent, but the landlord had got used to that. He knew that *she* would not make a moonlight flitting, but would pay him as soon as she could ; and so, provided she did not owe him two quarters' rent, he was grumpily satisfied. In a similarly limited manner, Mrs Dennis's credit was good with the tradesmen with whom she dealt. To trust her was no great trial of their faith. When she had no prospect of soon paying for a thing she wanted, she went without it. She had to go without a good many things.

Mrs Dennis was a widow, who made her living by letting furnished lodgings. It was very seldom that all her rooms were let at the same time, and still more seldom that she got a punctually paying lodger. Some of her lodgers were rogues, who cheated the poor old lady, but most of them were unlucky people, whom she did not like to press for money. She would have cut off her right hand rather than let it take the tithes of lodgers' eatables and drinkables, &c., which a good many London landladies, far better off than Mrs Dennis, feel no shame in appropriating ; and, therefore, it is almost needless to say that she could not afford to keep a servant. A little girl came once a week to clean the steps, and now and then a charwoman was hired. Almost the whole of the house-work Mrs Dennis did herself—fire-lighting, coal-carrying, bed-making, sweeping, dusting, washing, scrub-

bing, boot-cleaning, answering the door, and waiting on her lodgers.

A hard life this for an old woman past sixty ; and Mrs Dennis sometimes could not help feeling it to be so, when she got up in the dark winter mornings and went down into the cold kitchen to begin her daily drudge, or sat in the hot kitchen, tired out with her day's work, on a sultry summer night. And yet Mrs Dennis was very seldom out of spirits. She had a thinly sweet old voice, and went quavering about the house like a timidly happy singing mouse. Her carols could not be heard half-a-dozen yards off, but she was very anxious not to annoy her lodgers, and earnestly apologised when she imagined—groundlessly, for the most part—that any one had been obliged to listen to her perambulatory song. When, to save candle, she kept 'blindman's holiday' in her kitchen, she carefully closed the door, and warbled to herself in the same *sotto-voce* style. *She* did not think it *sotto-voce*.

One of her consolations was an impression that she possessed a voice of remarkable power and compass. Lodgers, with whom she became familiar, sometimes flattered the old lady into singing for their entertainment—entertainment in a sense which, I fear, would not have flattered the good old soul had she been aware of it. On these occasions she always began with an old-fashioned 'He' and 'She' love-ditty : shaking out the 'He' parts with a would-be pathetically-growing gravity that sorely tried the gravity of her hearers. In reply to the compliments which, nevertheless, followed her performance, she always made the same stereotyped reply : ' Ah !

I *could* sing that once. My poor father liked that song. Perhaps it was his partiality—no doubt it was—but he used to say that I did the gentleman's part so very well. His friends wanted him to let me be instructed for the stage, but, of course, he would not hear of that. We were very well off then ; and I am very glad now that he would not give his consent. I should have been exposed to such temptation. I was a giddy girl then, and I suppose I was thought pretty—people used to say so.'

Here the old lady would blush, and cast down her eyes, like a girl of seventeen—that is, as girls of seventeen used to blush and cast down their eyes in the distant time when she was a maiden of that age. Now-a-days the maiden-blush is rare, except on roses, and loud-dressing, fast-talking girls of seventeen stare men who regretfully remember modest girls, but whom *they* call 'muffs' and 'old fogies,' out of countenance

A belief that she had once been thought a great beauty was, it may be seen, another of Mrs Dennis's consolations—even more soothing, perhaps, than her voice. Of beauty, less proof was left even than of voice ; but Mrs Dennis believed in her beauty—past beauty, at any rate—as firmly, though not so outspokenly, as she believed in her Bible. She liked to be joked about wealthy old gentlemen who the wags amongst her lodgers were very fond of asserting had fallen in love with her. She pretended to be very much offended by such 'liberties,' but she evidently liked them and rebutted them merely on the ground that the old gentlemen indicated were far too old for her—even if she could ever forget poor Dennis, though he *had* not been the best of husbands ; or else

that they were too well looked after by selfishly-interested relatives to be allowed to marry.

A third consolation, as I have already hinted, was Mrs Dennis's remembrance of 'better days.' As a proof of her former affluence she pointed to her furniture—left her by her father. It was the only thing he did leave her, partly because he had not much more to leave when the first touch of Death's cold fingers frightened him into suddenly making his will; partly because he still bore a grudge against his daughter for having been wheedled into a marriage against his consent when he *was* comparatively 'affluent.' The old-fashioned furniture, no doubt, had once been valuable, but it looked as if, when Mrs Dennis received it, it could only have been the least valuable remnant of the garniture of a once well-to-do London merchant's house; and when I lodged at the old lady's, I should say that only a most generously compassionate broker would have offered £30 for the whole of Mrs Dennis's effects. Ten times that amount was the lowest appraisalment Mrs Dennis put upon them, however—in what she tried hard to think was the very improbable case of her ever being compelled to part, before death, with her furniture.

In spite of his hardness towards her, she had a reverence for the whilom 'position' of her father, and thought that his dimly gilt-framed oil portrait in her front parlour—although the paint *had* scaled off the nose—must not only make lodging-seekers hungry to pounce upon such a 'highly-respectably' decorated room, but would also bring in, at the very least, £50 at an auction. 'He was so well known,' the old lady used to say, 'and his friends

would quarrel who was to get it. *They* would remember what his nose was like in the City. *The City*!—the yesterday-forgetting City, in which the old man had been almost utterly forgotten for a quarter of a century at least.

The fact that the house in which she lived had once belonged to her father was another mysterious consolation to Mrs Dennis; but the harmlessly vain, and in many respects very humble, old lady, after all derived her great comfort from her simple faith in God—a faith which bore its fruit also in her willingness to help any one whom she could help, at any cost of time, trouble, or discomfort to herself. Of silver and gold she had none to give away, but she gave away far more coppers than she could afford; and weary as her multifarious household duties often made her poor old bones, she was always ready to give up a night's rest in order to wait upon a sick lodger or neighbour. She often fell asleep, and no wonder, whilst acting as Sister of Mercy; but a kinder nurse than she was when she could keep her eyes open, no one could wish to have.

It was whilst I was lying ill in her house, most kindly, however sleepily, nursed by her, that I learnt her history. She told it to me in instalments, chiefly, I think, to keep herself vigilant enough to be ready to pour out the refreshing barley-water she made for me.

She was a daughter of the Mr Brown, partner in a Mincing Lane firm, who had built, and for a long time tenanted, the big, square, ugly, but very comfortable house on whose long, broad, well-kept, well-stocked garden the front upper windows of Talavera Terrace

used to look out. Salamanca House it was called. Mr Brown was popularly considered the Croesus of that neighbourhood, and therefore the neighbourhood at first expressed great astonishment at Mr Brown's cutting up his paddock to build houses that would overlook his grounds. 'But that's the way with those rich men—millions of pounds won't satisfy them, if they can't make a penny more,' said the neighbourhood, to account for this strange freak of fancy. More astonishment was expressed when, on the death of Mrs Brown, Mr Brown let Salamanca House, sold Talavera Terrace, and removed, with gleanings of his Salamanca House furniture, into No. 1, as a mere yearly tenant. Mrs Dennis, who had then been living with her father for some time, although her husband was still alive, came with her father. Soon afterwards Mr Brown retired from business, and Mrs Dennis did almost all the housework. A rumour then ran abroad that Mr Brown had never been half as rich as he had been reported to be, and that, instead of voluntarily retiring, he had been forced out of his firm by a threat that otherwise he would be publicly disgraced, without receiving a penny for his share from his former partners. The oldest inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Salamanca House and Talavera Terrace, however, stuck to their belief that Mr Brown was immensely rich. They added that he had grown awfully miserly of late years—there *was* a time when he was as free-handed a gentleman as any one could wish to see. But partly from our widespread English worship of even reputed wealth, and partly from recollection of past profits got out of him, Mr Brown's tradesmen, though they joked with one

another about his 'nearness,' served him almost as well and as respectfully when he potted down to them to pick out a chop, &c., for his small household's dinner, as they had done in the days when he had given lavish entertainments to a score of 'friends.'

The real state of the case was that the disappointed old man had worked himself up from very lowly beginnings (these, good Mrs Dennis slurred over in her narrative) into almost the chief position in 'a colonial produce' firm. His eldest son, whom he had introduced into the firm, had done him great credit, but had died long before his prime, leaving Mr Brown a very cantankerous orphan grand-daughter, who, nevertheless, for his son's sake, he had sworn should be comfortably provided for. His second son, also introduced into the firm, had proved a scamp, and had fled the country. He had robbed the firm to such a fearful extent that, in order to screen him from exposure, Mr Brown, after sadly cutting down his private banking-account, had at last been obliged to relinquish his own share in the business for next to nothing. He had found out also that his son had long robbed him in other ways—abetted in so doing by his weakly indulgent mother.

The old man had also, in a more venial way, been deceived and disappointed by his daughter. (It was queer to hear my quiet old landlady reproaching herself for having been 'a sad wild girl then.') She had fallen in love with a handsome, restless, worthless younger son of a younger son of an old family, who had taken it into his head to try commerce—one of a hundred of eventually wasteful whims. A small premium had been paid

by his mother for his instruction in business by the Mincing Lane firm. If he took to it, capital was to be forthcoming from wealthier members of the family for his admission into the firm as a junior partner. Plebeian Mr Brown was gratified by the deference paid him by his plausible, 'gentlemanly' clerk, and often asked him down to Salamanca House. Miss Brown fell in love with him; Mr Layer-Marney Dennis graciously permitted himself to be fallen in love with; and Mrs Brown, liking the soft-spoken, handsome young man, and thinking a match with him would be a social lift for her daughter, fostered the 'mutual attachment' on the sly. Although Mr Brown had been rather proud of his aristocratic clerk, he had intended that his daughter should become the wife of a far wealthier man, and he, therefore, was highly indignant when he found that she had been married to her lover with her mother's connivance. He vowed that he would never do anything for the young people. The Dennises were also highly indignant, and made similar vows.

But Mr Frederick Tolleshunt D'Arcy Layer-Marney Dennis was one of the people who somehow force their friends and acquaintances, for a time, to save them the trouble of providing for themselves. He bothered his 'family,' he pestered his father-in-law. It was not much in the way of money he got from his family, but they made use of their influence to obtain for him a series of those singular small berths, the chief duty in connection with which consists in receiving a snug little salary out of the public's purse, which in those days more plentifully than now—although they are not yet extinct—families that possessed 'interest' could procure for their *vaurien*

belongings ; and as to Mr Brown, his purse-pride, to say nothing of his feelings as a father, would not let him allow his daughter to be supported solely on what he called her husband's beggar's pay.

Mr Layer-Marney Dennis bled his father-in-law, directly, very largely, and when the old man's patience was exhausted, Mrs Brown helped her son-in-law to bleed her husband indirectly. The old man, of course, got to know that he had been deceived and defrauded, and grew harder than ever towards the daughter who had forced such a connection upon him. When his son-in-law became such an utter *vaurien* that his wife could no longer live with him, but fled in terror to her father's, he would only take her in on condition that she gave up all further communication not only with her husband, but also with her poor children. She was weak enough to give the promise which she knew at the time she made it she would break ; and then leagued with her mother and the servants in smuggling help to her children, and smuggling them into Salamanca House, one at a time, on clandestine visits.

The children were taught by their father to look down upon their maternal grandfather as a grasping, and by their grandmother to regard him as a savage, ogre, at the sound of whose distant footfall they must hide in cupboards like frightened rabbits fleeing to their burrows, or scared mice scurrying into their holes. There was the chance, too, that the servants might betray them, or that their cantankerous cousin, when home for her holidays, might require some bribe, above the grandmother's power to grant, to prevent her from carrying out her often

iterated threat to 'let grandpa know how everybody was cheating him,' and yet the Layer-Marney Dennis girls (the boys were very rarely introduced into Salamanca House, as being dangerous explosives) enjoyed, whilst they were children, the excitement of a visit on the sly to 'Old Brownie's,' although their pride revolted at the thought of having to appear afraid of the grandfather their father called a money-grubbing snob, and at having to propitiate, however cavalierly, their cantankerous plebeian cousin, Maria Brown. So-called 'pride' was almost the only thing which the young Dennises had inherited or been taught.

They had all had aristocratic godfathers and godmothers, who had done none of the things for them which godfathers and godmothers solemnly promise to do, and exceedingly few of the things which, in a secular point of view, rich godfathers and godmothers are conventionally supposed to promise to do. The timid, disillusioned mother, for the sake of the half-grudged shelter she found in her father's house, had left her children, almost to sink or swim as chance might choose. (My poor old landlady cried with bitter self-reproach when she told me how she had been driven to leave her children, sobbing out the piteous apology, 'But I could do nothing for them, sir. I was made nothing of, and the poor children could see it.')

Mr Layer-Marney Dennis, when, in any of his many mysterious ways, he chanced to be momentarily 'flush' of cash, would give his children extravagant treats, but at other times he would callously leave them literally without food. He prided himself on his gracefully senten-

tious mode of speech, and, when warm with wine, would favour his children, ere he retired to rest, with spoken little essays, *à la* Bacon's written ones, on the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of vice. He shuddered and scolded when any vulgarism outcropped in their speech as he would have done if he had seen vermin on their flesh. But because his 'family' and his father-in-law would not advance him sufficient funds to educate and place his children in the ways he thought compatible with his 'position in the world,' they might have grown up in utter ignorance of anything good and useful so far as he was concerned. And he made his younger children, when (as was frequently the case) he had no servant, put off duns with such shameless falsehoods that, angry as the duns were at being kept waiting for their money, their pecuniary wrath was almost swallowed up in indignant fatherly pity for the little ones. One irate creditor, who had stalked Mr Layer-Marney Dennis into his house, on being told, by his youngest daughter that her papa was not at home, exclaimed with an oath, 'It's a cowardly shame that he should make an innocent little thing like you tell such barefaced lies. I hope he hears me—and I know he *does*.'

Mr Layer-Marney Dennis did hear his creditor, and started from his chair with a momentary intention of knocking down the insolent snob who had impugned his honour and insulted his child. But pecuniary prudence restrained him. He waited until the indignant creditor, anxious to save the child trouble, and to secure another mode of expressing his feelings, had slammed the door behind him, and then Mr Layer-Marney came out into the

hall, and expressed his virtuous wrath that a daughter of *his* should have heard an oath and such a horrid word as 'lie.' 'Always say "*falsehood*," my child—the meaning is the same, and "*falsehood*" is not vulgar.'

'If you want any more lies told, you may tell them yourself, papa,' was the reply of the little maiden, burning, trembling, sobbing, under the hot load of shame, the scorching weight of which she felt that her *arbiter elegantiarum* father ought rightfully to bear.

Mr Layer-Marney Dennis disappeared from England soon after his father-in-law's death. Nobody belonging to him knew whither he had gone, until his youngest daughter received a line from the English chaplain in one of the English-frequented continental towns, announcing her father's death. It was a very cold, curt note. In spite of his rightfully venerable orders, the English chaplain was not really 'Reverend,' and was so accustomed to the miserable ends of compatriots who, literally and figuratively, indulged in neat-brandy dissipation, whilst he only mildly muddled himself with weak brandy-and-water ditto, that he had no pity to spare in informing their friends of their deaths, when he understood that those friends were not pecunious. The chaplain wrote a most eloquently pathetic letter to the head of Mr Layer-Marney Dennis's family on the occasion of his death, and no doubt was indignantly disgusted when the said head took no notice of his letter, although it had contained a delicately ingenious allusion to the numerous English charities in want of help in the town in which 'your, perchance, erring, but still highly-gifted, most genial, and *truly repentant* kinsman sleeps well after life's fitful fever.'

This letter had been forwarded by the head of the family, without a word of sympathy—after all though, sympathy, in such a case, would have been polite humbug—to Mrs Dennis ; but she had already heard from her youngest daughter of her husband's death : and soon her daughter came to live with her, and take the heaviest part of the dull drudgery of her lodging-letting off her hands.

None of her other children had ever cared much about their mother. Some had died, others had drifted off into such marriages and livings as they could manage to make. None of them came near her. 'It was only natural, perhaps, poor dears—I had never done anything for *them*. But it was very lonely for me,' sobbed Mrs Dennis, crying over the trouble as if it were a thing of yesterday ; 'and, indeed, sir, it was not *all* my fault. I *could* not do anything for them. It seems a shameful thing for a mother to leave her children, whatever she may have to suffer ; but I was fairly *driven* from mine. My poor husband—I hope he *did* repent, and is safe in heaven now, poor man—did all he could to make my children look down on me. But my sweet Lucy always loved me. Oh, what a comfort that dear girl was to me ! though it used to grieve me to see her—such a beautiful girl she was, and such a real lady, though the poor child had never been sent to school—sagging from morning to night, and soiling her pretty hands. There was her cousin that had I don't know how much spent on *her* education, and yet she looked like a scullery-maid beside my Lucy, and couldn't sing, or do anything half as well. Maria used to get so angry because, though she did have Salamanca House left her, people weren't half as respectful to her as

they were to my Lucy. If my poor father had spent his money on her, he would have got something for it. I am afraid it was wicked, but sometimes I couldn't help thinking that it was hard that Maria should have that nice house—£15 a year she gets for it, and the gentleman's taken it on a repairing lease—and my poor Lucy not have a single penny. I didn't expect that father would leave anything to any of the others, but I *did* think he would have remembered *her*. He'd seen her once or twice, and seemed to have taken a kind of fancy to her. She wouldn't hide from him as the others did, and spoke up to him once—not saucily, you know, sir, but still as if she wasn't afraid of him—because she thought he wasn't speaking properly to me. But money would be of no use to her now, dear girl. She's where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through nor steal. Every one liked my Lucy. She was like a bird or a sunbeam in the house. Ah, it was a different house to me then. She was so thoughtful and so lively, and both with my poor husband and my father I hadn't had the happiest of lives. I thought happiness had begun for me at last. We had to work hard, but we didn't care for that. It was so nice to be together, with no one to interfere with us. I thought I should have her to look after me, and to cheer me up, as long as I lived. Of course, she would have married—she was so sweetly pretty, but *she* wouldn't have forgotten her poor old mother. But it wasn't to be. I *couldn't* say "Blessed be the name of the Lord" when He took her—just a year after he gave her back to me. But I can now, blessed be His name. Twenty years my dear girl's been lying in her grave, and I've been a

lonely old woman. She cannot come to me, but I shall go to her soon, thank God. Every Sunday afternoon, when I can get out, I go to my dear girl's grave, and it won't be long before I go never to come back again. I'm glad now she was taken first. She'd have missed me, dear girl, but now there's no one that'll mind much when I'm gone.'

The old lady cried quietly for a few minutes, and then said cheerfully, 'But there, *I'm* a nice nurse, ain't I? to be keeping you awake like this. You shut your eyes, like a good boy, and I'll sing you off to sleep.'

I fell asleep as the good old soul was quavering—'I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.' *She* has long been peacefully sleeping in the same grave with her darling daughter.

A sudden recollection of my old lodgings, when I was in the neighbourhood the other day, made me wish to have a look at Talavera Terrace, where I had not been since I was quite a young man. I found it, as I have intimated, 'improved off the surface of the earth,' and though it was a very depressing place whilst it existed, I could not help feeling sorry when I suddenly found that it was no longer extant. We are happier than we think when we are miserable; pleasant associations cluster around the dreariest spots. At any rate we fancy so when we go back in middle age to places in which once, if poor in purse, we were rich in youth—the care-defying, hopeful youth that has gone from us for ever.

It was some time before I could find any one who remembered the old tenant of the vanished No. 1, Talavera Terrace. At last I fell in with an old woman who had

been her charwoman." "She's dead, sir—dead ever so long ago," said the old woman. "I used to like to work for Mrs Dennis. She was so nice-spoken, and she fed me as well, and paid me as well, too, as I got anywhere, though she *was* so poor. It's queer, sir, ain't it?" that she should have *been* so poor, for she was the only child of the rich Mr Brown that built Salamanca House yonder, and left half a million to the hospitals. And she married a young lord too, but he were a wild un. Anyhow, poor Mrs Dennis's furnitur' had to bury her, and it were only just enough. She's buried with her daughter, Miss Louisa.'

'Did you ever see her daughter?'

'No, I didn't know *her*—my sister used to char for Mrs Dennis then. But I've heard my sister say that Miss Louisa were a real tip-top lady—she give up a grand fortun' to come and live with her mother. She was a real beauty, too, I've heard sister say, and yet the smilin'est, civilest young creatur' you ever come acrost, 'cept that she'd pull you up pretty sharp if she thought you was taking liberties with her mother. Yes, sir, dead and buried Mrs Dennis is, and for all her rich father and her fine husband, there wasn't one as belonged to her as followed her to the grave.'

V.

‘ALL ’OT.’

IT is not wonderful that well-to-do people know so little, as a rule, of the dreary wildernesses of the East-end of London—*they* lie far away from the daily rounds of most well-to-do people. But it *is* astonishing that so many well-to-do people know literally nothing of Church Lane, Bloomsbury—a slum, whose crowded, fetid squalor cannot be beaten in the East-end, and yet within a few minutes’ walk of the British Museum, and within a stone’s cast of Mudie’s Library. Hard by, three churches of different denominations, standing side by side, turn their backs upon Church Lane, in a brick and mortar point of view. In a spiritual and charitable sense they do not do so, but I suspect that, comparatively, very few well-to-do members of the congregations of those three churches have ever seen the pariah-peopled purlieu for whose benefit they subscribe money and organise agencies, and within ear-shot of whose brawls, week after week, for years, they

may have assembled to worship God according to their various forms.

A year or two back I renewed my acquaintance with this unsavoury specimen of the slums known as St Giles's Rookery, to which glittering New Oxford Street was far too sparing a surgeon's knife. It cut through the wen, but the foul humours of the excised part retreated to fester in increased virulence in the unexcised portions. As some years had elapsed between the visit to Church Lane to which I have just referred, and the one I had last previously paid it, the contrast between the Lane and the great thoroughfare close to which it lurks struck me almost as forcibly as at the time when I first visited it.

In Oxford Street the July sunlight blazed on plate-glass and gilt mouldings, in front of which gaily-dressed women swayed hither and thither like wind-stirred tulip-beds. The wares exposed within for sale, drapery, upholstery, porcelain, Parian, *bric à brac*, &c., appealed to buyers, not puzzled, as poor folks are, to scrape together money enough to buy a few absolute necessities, but so wealthy as to be puzzled how to spend their wealth on a sufficiently varied choice of luxuries. Iced hock, iced claret, iced pale ale and cider, were being quaffed at the marble-topped, flower-decked luncheon-bars. The very costermongers' barrows showed that money was plentiful in Oxford Street. There, as in the heart of the City, they were heaped, not merely with fragrant pine-apples (which, whole or sliced, are hawked all over London), but with apricots and greengages, retailed at a price not very much less than that at which they were being sold in the Covent Garden arcade.

I turned out of the bright, prosperous thoroughfare into a malodorous, overshadowed side-street which links it with dingy Broad Street, Bloomsbury—almost the only London Broad Street that justifies its name. Out of this side-street Church Lane runs at right angles, and into this side-street the specialties of Church Lane, so to speak, overflow. Bare-headed, bronzed or brick-dust-complexioned women sit along the side-paths, nursing their knees. Bristly-chinned men lounge against doorposts, smoking black pipes and scratching their dusty shocks of hair. Beneath the raised grimy window-sashes of low lodging-houses you see grubby knuckles tightened over smut-smeared hunks of bread, on deal tables, literally ‘as black as the back of the chimney.’

But this side-street on the afternoon to which I refer seemed a retreat for ‘Retired Leisure,’ in comparison with the Lane that ran out of it.

The long narrow chasm was crammed with dirty, ragged men, women, prematurely womanish girls, hobbydehoys, and children—squatting and panting like frogs on a dusty turnpike road, smoking in silence, wrangling and fighting with chronic cantankerousness and acute accesses of fiendish rage, or indulging in indecent horseplay almost as shameless as the language which accompanied it. Dark-hued, half-washed rags dangled from the lines that made an almost continuous series of cat’s-cradles along the Lane—sending out a steam as miasmatic as the fog of a mangrove-swamp, and dripping into pestilential puddles of pitchy mud in which herring-heads and vegetable refuse rotted.

One reeling sot was stuttering out,—

'For Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.'

Poor wretch! Much good *Civis-Britannicus* privileges had done *him*—much good had they done any of his neighbours, who grinningly applauded his bitterly ironical refrain.

The man I was in search of in Church Lane was no sot, but a most miserable object did he look when at last I found him out. It was with some difficulty that I discovered the house in which he was lodging, and when I had reached it, I had to perform a clumsy kind of egg-dance over the bodies of half a dozen snorers of both sexes, sprawling in the filthy low square lobby.

With all my care, I was unfortunate enough to put my foot down on the arm of an old woman sleeping off the effects of the excessive quantity of drink which somehow or other she had been able to get, although she looked as if she had not had a sufficient meal for years. Her clothes were so scanty, tattered, crumpled, and filth-sodden that, half-blinded by the glaring sunlight, out of which I had stepped into the dusky lobby, I had really mistaken her for a mere bundle of old rags. Up she staggered with sleepy sulkiness, and then, recovering consciousness enough to ascertain who it was that had disturbed her slumber, she crooked her lean long trembling fingers like the talons of a bird of prey, and flew at me, swearing that she would have my heart out. I slipped, however, up two shallow steps into the common room of the lodging-house, and as I did so, dizzy drowsiness again overcame the old woman, and she fell to the ground. A knot of roughs lounging at the door, who had been watching her onslaught on me with great amusement, burst into a loud

guffaw, but she paid no heed to them. Pillowing her head on her arm upon one of the steps, in half a minute she was sound asleep again.

The room I entered was very low. The floor was of worn, uneven brick. The plaster of the walls and ceiling looked as if it had been black-washed with soot. Great pieces of it had fallen, leaving gaps of grimy lath and dust-clotted hair and cobwebs. A crooked, dark, cupboard-staircase opened into the room at one corner. An Irish bricklayer's labourer was snoring on his back on one of the filthy forms. At one of the open windows, the panes of which, through accumulated dirt and paper-patches, had long ceased to be transparent, and were only very partially translucent even, sat an old Irishwoman, sprawling her brawny, bare, brown arms on the window-sill, and smoking a greasily-perspiring black pipe, so short that the bowl nearly touched her nose : the glow of the tobacco, when she took her solemnly slow 'pulls,' unnecessarily increased the red of that prominent, and yet flat, feature. At one of the filthy tables sat a sly-faced hobbydehoy and a bold-faced girl, sharing a pot of porter and a meal of bread and cheese and onions.

Fresh scents of onions and rank tobacco, stale smells of tobacco and oleaginous cookery, chronic malodours of all kinds of dusty-musty-fustiness, combined to make an atmosphere that (in spite of the open windows, through which air only a very little less tainted crept sluggishly) was nearly insupportable. Notwithstanding the heat of the day, a good fire was burning in the broad range of this common room. It was the kitchen as well as the coffee-room of the humble hotel, and its customers doing

all their cooking for themselves, and taking their food at all hours of the day, the lodging-house fire could not be suffered to get low. If the room was too hot for any of the inmates after they had finished their cooking and their eating, why, they could follow the fashion of the neighbourhood, and go and loll and squat outside in the lane, with their coats and waistcoats off, or their unhooked gown-fronts flung back in a *décolleté* style that made dustmen's wives look *almost* as fashionable, so far, as dukes' daughters, in this revived Sir-Peter-Lelyan period.

But the man I had come to visit was drinking in the heat of the fire as a man parched with thirst gulps water. Crouching in a high-backed settle, placed so as to shelter him from the draughts from the windows and the doors, he hung shivering over the fire, bathing his quivering yellow hands and tattered knees close to the bars in the torrid air the red coals toasted. He was sallowly-pale, he had not been shaved for a week or two, his clothes were very shabby, his scanty, frayed linen was by no means clean; and yet somehow he looked as if he had been a smart, tidy fellow. He had been half-starved, and was plainly very ill, and yet he tried to talk in a cheerfully contented tone. It was evidently a hard task to do so, and yet I could see also that he was not shamming—that he was trying to bear up bravely because he thought it was not right to grumble at anything that God had allowed to happen to him. He did not profess to think that he had been treated justly by the master whose sudden dismissal of him had reduced him to his piteous plight, but still he made charitable allowance for his master, saying

that he was a very good master, if only he would not be quite so sure that he was always right.

The poor fellow—his name was Samuel Farrant, and when I first saw him he was about five-and-twenty—had been employed as a porter and man-of-all-work in the yard of a hasty and yet dogged-tempered acquaintance of mine. As Sam said, his master *was*, in more senses than one, a good master. He did not overwork his men, he paid them good wages, he did not treat them as if they were of an entirely different flesh-and-blood from his own—mere animated machines of which the Almighty had beneficently created a superabundance for the accommodation of his pet creatures, the possessors of capital. But, *per contra*, Mr —— was very apt to take offence, and to jump to conclusions, and when he had once committed himself to an opinion, he could scarcely ever be prevailed upon to show the manliness of openly owning that he had been wrong, though the proofs that he had been mistaken might be so unanswerable that the only reply he could make to them was a peevish ‘pish!’ After his own peculiar fashion, he was a conscientious man, and when he found that his suspicions had unjustly punished any one, he tried to make some cowardly kind of amends upon the sly; but he could scarcely ever be got to forgive any one whom he had injured the grievous offence of having momentarily troubled his calm belief in his omniscience. He bore a grudge against such people. If they had not done exactly the bad deeds of which he had accused them, he felt sure that they were capable of doing such deeds, and worse—that he could not be mistaken in his general estimate of character. And this conviction made

him mean both in the mode and the amount of his compensation to the victims of his hasty, obstinate suspiciousness.

He had dismissed Farrant, at a moment's notice, and without a character, because he had suspected him of dishonesty, and when accused of it, Sam had answered somewhat warmly. 'Five years I'd been with him, and he'd never had a word to say against me, sir,' said Sam. 'So it did seem hard that my character should go for nothing with him.' His master had soon discovered that Sam had been quite guiltless of the fraud imputed to him, but then it was his master who had made the imputation, and, besides, according to the master's impression, Sam had answered saucily. The master, therefore, when he found that he had been wrong, would not own that he had been so, but tried to quiet the prickings of his conscience by saying to himself that Farrant had all along been a cunning sneak—respectful enough so long as he could go on robbing, but turning insolent, just that he might be sent away, the moment he saw that his character was seen through. 'He didn't take that seventeen shillings and elevenpence, perhaps,' said Mr ——. 'That dolt of a Jones says now that he paid it in to him: but I'll be bound to say the insolent scamp has robbed me of a good deal more than that, if I only went into his goings-on.'

Mr —, however, did *not* go into Sam's goings-on. He tried to content himself with the thought that he was well rid of the 'insolent scamp.' Such satisfaction, probably, was not very soothing, but Mr — did his best to forget all about saucy Sam Farrant.

Sam's dismissal did not affect himself alone. The only

surviving member of his family of whom he knew anything was a great-aunt who had brought him up, and who in her old age had obtained shelter in a row of London almshouses. Sam had been in the habit of supplementing this old woman's little stipend out of his wages, and of taking tea with her every Sunday afternoon, the guest providing the tea, sugar, &c. But when he lost his situation, and could get no other, of course he had no money to spend on his aunt; and the old lady choosing to believe that he had done something very bad, to be turned so unceremoniously out of a place he had held so long, Sam got so little sympathy and so much scolding at his aunt's, that he was forced to give up visiting her.

At this aunt's, moreover, his 'young woman' had for some time taken tea with him on her every-other 'Sunday out.' They had 'kept company' for a couple of years, and were thinking of getting married when Sam was dismissed. The girl was fond of him, but she was a bit of a coquette. Servant-girls are often quite as pretty and as plaguesome to their lovers as their young mistresses; and Sam's Esther had always made him feel that, with such a choice of admirers as she had, he must not make too sure of her. It was with some heart-sinking, therefore, that he went to meet his *affiancée* at his aunt's on the first Sunday after Mr —— had turned him off. She was mortified at what had happened, and for contradiction's sake, rather than from conviction, she professed to believe with his aunt that he had deserved to be dismissed.

The lovers quarrelled. Poor Sam went away before tea, thinking that there was no one in the world that cared anything for him. Esther had hard work to keep from cry-

ing ; but, nevertheless, she bade him good-bye in the most indifferent of tones, cruelly adding that there were plenty who would be glad to see her home. Then she and the old woman talked together in forced high spirits, as if nothing had happened ; and then each began to feel snappish with the other for being unjust, and helping to make *her* unjust, to Sam ; and long before her usual time Esther took her departure from the almshouses, resolved that she would not enter them again until she had 'made it up' with her lover. She went to church, and then she walked about, feeling very lonely in the crowd of twos and threes that thronged the pavements, in order that her fellow-servant on duty might get no hint of what had happened, as she would have done if Esther had gone straight home when she left 'Aunt Newman's.' In the course of her circuitous route homewards, Esther saw two of her admirers, the baker's man and the milkman, both looking very smart in their Sunday clothes. She could have made either proudly happy by allowing him to become her escort, but she would have nothing to say to either, turning down side-streets to avoid their notice. And when she got home, on the plea of a 'sick headache,' she went to bed without her supper, and, as soon as she had locked her bedroom door, in colloquial phrase she 'cried her eyes out.'

Of course I am relating things that I learnt after my interview with Sam in Church Lane, and to explain how I got there I must mention a few more.

Sam tried hard for work, but not being able to refer to his late master for a character, he could get nothing permanent. The snug, trim room in which he lodged soon began to look drearily bare. Its little ornaments disap-

peared first one by one, and then by the half-dozen together, as leaves fall from a tree in autumn. At last it was stripped even of its most necessary articles of furniture, and Sam had to find shelter in lodging-houses, sinking, as his cash and his chances grew less and less, from comparatively respectable ones to ambiguous ones, and so down into the indisputably disreputable Church Lane hostelry.

The foul deeds and words which he was obliged to see and hear, the foul air he breathed, the filth of all kinds in which his fellow-lodgers lived and moved and had their being, were all sickening to Sam. It was not long before he fell ill—so ill that he resolved to appeal to Mr——. But he had no money left to buy paper, pen, and ink, and if he had been able to buy them, his hand shook so from his weakness that he would not have been able to use them. A begging-letter-writer, however, was a frequenter of the lodging-house—a crafty, lazy old knave, but willing to do a kindness now and then.

Scarcely any one is a thorough scamp—any more than thorough saints are common. Apples rotten all through, and apples without a single speck, are about equally rare, and men in this respect are very much like apples. The Church Lane ‘screever’ had no particular liking for Sam—he was not one of the screever’s ‘sort;’ nevertheless, he took pity on Sam in his helplessness, and consented to write him a letter for nothing, not even charging for the paper or postage-stamp. This letter, to Mr——, the recipient handed to me one day when I called upon him, and asked me what I thought of it. When I had read it, I said that I did not think much good of it—that it was plainly written by a professional beggar. The screever, al-

though gratuitously pleading the cause of an honest man, had not been able to weed his style of its wonted whining cant.

'Of course, it's a do,' answered Mr —— triumphantly. 'Sam Farrant couldn't write a free hand like that to save his life.'

'But he does not profess to have written it,' I pointed out. 'The writer, whoever he is, says that Farrant is too ill to write himself. There's a nasty twang about the letter; but still I think it's worth inquiring into, especially since you admit that you turned the man away without just cause.'

'I never admitted anything of the kind,' bellowed Mr ——. 'The fellow's a scamp, and no mistake. Look at the company he is keeping. What I did say was that I had found out that he didn't happen to pocket just the money I gave him the sack for. He was saucy enough then, but now he thinks he can get over me by sneaking. What is it to me that he hasn't been able to get work? He should have kept a good place when he'd got it. It's no business of mine, but if you choose to bother your head about the fellow, and find that he really *is* ill, I don't mind letting you have a trifle to give to him. You're not to say it comes from me, mind; the fellow would fancy that he had a hold on me, and turn saucy again. Or, stay, you can send him to the hospital—I can get him a governor's order for Bartholomew's—and then you can give him the money to start him when he comes out. I say, yours is an easy way of being charitable—other people take the trouble, and find the money, and you get the credit.'

That was the light in which Mr —— wanted me to think he looked, and all impartial people of common sense must

look, upon his conduct ; but he talked fast, and glanced at me suspiciously, as if he was afraid that I should find out that he felt more compunction than he professed.

Acting on these instructions, I found my way to Church Lane. Farrant was evidently very ill, and I thought, in spite of my previous prejudice, when I had talked with him for a few minutes, a very honest fellow. I grew interested in him, and soon went back for the hospital-order. Mr — professed to be very much amused at what he called the easy way in which I could be talked over, but he sent a clerk with a note for the governor's letter, wrote me out a cheque for five pounds, and then said that he washed his hands of Farrant ; that there were not many employers who would take as much trouble as he had done about a worthless fellow dismissed for misconduct. His tone, however, was still not self-assured. I could see that the cheque and the hospital-order were not quite so broad plaisters as he wanted them to be for his wounded self-esteem.

Sam could not be got into the hospital until the next morning. So, making such provision as I could for his comfort in that uncomfortable place, and handing him, out of the little fund of which Mr — had made me the trustee, enough to pay his landlady and his cab-fare in the morning, I left him to spend another night in Church Lane.

More than a fortnight elapsed before I could visit him in the hospital. When I did go, I found that he had been very ill indeed, but was already getting better. The cleanliness, the quiet, the good food, the skill and kind attendance which he had experienced, were telling on him wonderfully. Sam had grown almost lively, and quite loquacious. 'I want to get out now as much as I wanted to

get in, sir—and it'll be easier work, I fancy. Everything's nice in here, but it's strange when the hospital's so good to them that do get in, it should be so gruff to them that only wants to get in. Ordered about like a dog I was down below, the morning I came, for all the letter you was good enough to give me. No, I don't mean the doctors—but those beadle-fellows. There was a good chap from the lodging-house came with me, and spoke up to them, or I do believe they'd ha' hustled me out into Smithfield without letting me speak to a doctor. You'd have thought that such as them would have more fellow-feeling for poor folks, but it ain't so—the doctors is twenty times as kind. However, it's a sin to grumble. God has been very good to me. I ain't strong yet, but I feel twice the man I did before I came in a'ready. Everybody's been kind, excep' the beadies. They're just like the prickson the blackberry bushes. And if there wasn't pricks, p'raps the blackberries would get eat too fast ; and so there may be some use in the beadies, though I don't think they need be so cheeky. If there's more sick folks than there's room for, of course them that comes last must get last served, but it would be just as easy, I should say, to speak civil to 'em. When you're ailin', a word you'd think nothing of another time runs into ye like a nail. But, thank God, I did get in, and, thank God, I'm gettin' better fast. I oughtn't to be grumbling.'

'The good chap from the lodging-house,' of whom Sam spoke, I found, was the rascally, kindly old begging-letter writer. So long a time had elapsed between the despatch of his letter to Mr —— and my first visit to the lodg-

ing house, and I had so carefully kept the secret of my acquaintance with Mr —, that, shrewd though the screever was, he had soon ceased to suspect that his letter had brought me to Church Lane. What I had told Sam was, that I was commissioned by a friend to be an almoner to some one in distress, and that, roaming about in Bloomsbury, I had stumbled upon him. This he had told again to his honorary secretary when he came back to his lodging in the evening, and although professional feeling made the screever maintain at first that his epistolary rhetoric must have something to do with my appearance, he owned at last that it was far more likely, from what Sam told him of Mr —, that I *was* an emissary from some philanthropist at large. The screever did not often talk unreservedly to Sam, but on this occasion he could not refrain from remarking, 'I wish I could find out your anonymous friend. I could furnish him with wide scope for the indulgence of his benevolence—it would be a kindness, just like milking a cow when she feels uneasy. Of course, it is not the governor you have got the order from. People like that almost always want an "acknowledgment in the *Times*," in a regular subscription list, too, in good company, for anything they do.'

Partly to get a chance of discovering Sam's anonymous benefactor, partly because the screever's professional pride was ruffled by the supposed failure of an application that he had written from good feeling, and with, as he thought, even more force than usual, because he had real facts to work upon, partly because he liked a ride that somebody else had paid for, and partly because he really pitied poor Sam's lonely helplessness, the screever had gone for the

cab in the morning, accompanied Sam in it to Smithfield, and almost fought him up to the notice of the admitting doctor.

The screever could get no hint at the hospital as to the identity of the anonymous benefactor, and so he fell back upon the St Bartholomew's governor; pestering him with begging letters to such an extent that, discovering the reason of the fiction, the governor complained bitterly to Mr —— of having had his good-nature imposed on, and Mr ——, 'passing on the pinch,' as schoolboys say, became downright rude to me, and, of course, professed to believe more firmly than ever that Farrant was an utter scamp.

Meantime, however, Sam rapidly got well, and in September he was discharged from hospital. I had now to think what would be the best use to put the little trust-fund to. Sam thought that he should like to try the 'all 'ot,' or baked potato business, and his trustee approved of the speculation. Mr —— at this time was so set against Sam, that I did not think of consulting him, fearing that if I did he might revoke his £5. Enough of his gift was left to smarten up Sam's previously very scanty wardrobe with a whole coat, a white apron, &c., and to buy him a potato-can; and then there was a balance sufficient to supply him with stock-money for potatoes, butter, pepper, salt, charcoal, and the baking of his potatoes. His can was second-hand—not one of those huge, loudly-hissing, blazing-lamped machines of dazzling brass, which are to humbler baked-potato cans as broad-gauge Great-Western locomotives are to narrow-gauge Great-Eastern; but still, it was a very respectable narrow-gauge engine,

and when Sam had polished its brass mountings, it looked almost as good as new. Sam was as pleased with it as a little girl with her first doll, as proud of it as an artist of what he thinks his first masterpiece. Sam lugged the can about in his new lodgings under pretence of getting used to carry it; he placed it in every variety of light the bare little room afforded, and then backed to admire it proudly. 'Give my duty, please, sir, to that kind friend o' yours and mine,' said Sam, when I had called to see him the evening before he began his potato campaign, 'and tell him, please, sir, that he's made a man of me. I feel sure that I shall get along like a house a-fire now. I've asked God to bless the taties, and He'll do it. It's such a providence all through. There was your kind friend that wanted somebody to be kind to, and there was you that was kindly willing to find somebody out, and you come straight to me, when you might have gone to scores that, perhaps, wanted it as much, and was more deservin' of it.'

But Sam was too modest to think himself a special pet of Heaven. The fact that he had been helped, when hundreds who wanted help as much, and were, as he admitted, quite as deserving of it, had been left unhelped, painfully puzzled him, when his use of the conventional phraseology to which he had been accustomed brought the two sides of the question before him. 'Anyhow, though, God's been very good to me,' he went on. 'There can't be any harm in thankin' Him on my bended knees for what He's done for me, though He mayn't have been pleased to do as much for other poor chaps. No, nor there can't be any harm in feelin' grateful to the kind

gentleman and you, sir, for what you've done. I wish you'd let me know where he lives, and where you live, sir. I'd bring ye both such a supper o' baked taties to-morrow night. Prime taties I've bought, and Voelcker has promised to do justice to 'em. He's a furriner, sir, but he's a very respectable man for all that. Five-and-twenty sacks—thirty, some say—he does a week. I've bought first-rate taties to give me a start, and I mean to go on buyin' first-rate taties to keep my name up. I shall make bold to ask you again, sir, for the name of the gentleman, for as soon as ever I can, I must pay him back what he's lent me. If you won't tell me who he is, you must take it, if you'll excuse me, sir, and lend it out to some other poor cove in want of a lift. I feel sure that I shall get on like a house a-fire. I'd always a leaning like to baked taties, and now I've got the chance I'll use it. It's clean, when once the taties is scrubbed, and it's warm, and it's welcome to your customers; and then, when trade is slack, you can make a fillin' meal out of your own stock, and still have plenty left to sell. It's a satisfying, respectable business, the baked-taty business is. P'raps Esther' [Sam had told me all about Esther, and here his countenance fell]—'P'raps Esther, though, mayn't think it respectable. She's very genteel, and she's so sought after, mayhap she'd turn up her nose at anything out-o'-doors. But I needn't let her know anything about it till I've made a lot, and then, if she don't like it, I can take to something else. But, perhaps, she'll have been snapt up by that time. There's so many after her.'

Sam's countenance fell so very low here, that I began

to rally him on his fidelity to a girl who had thrown him over as soon as fortune frowned upon him. But Sam would not have a word said against Esther.

‘She didn’t throw me over, sir,’ he warmly asserted, ‘just because I’d lost my berth, but because aunt somehow made her believe that I was a scamp. It wasn’t a nice trick for poor old aunt to play me, but I don’t believe *she* thinks so now. She was so good to me when I was a little ‘un, and she’s known me ever since till lately. She can’t think I’d go priggin’. And Esther never did think I would—that’s my impression. She was vexed, as she nat’rally might be, and I was more than vexed, and so I didn’t make s’ficient ‘lowance for her feelins. If I hadn’t gone off in a huff, I could ha’ talked her over, but I was so down in the mouth, and yet I felt so savage that them as knew me, best was so ready to doubt me soon’s ever master went against me, that I couldn’t find a word to say; and if I could ha’ talked, I wouldn’t then, I was so riled. But I’ll make it right with Esther yet—she was a deal fonder o’ me then than she was of any of the others that was after her. That is, if she hain’t been snapt up a’ready. She’s so genteel, and she’d such a lot to pick from. You mustn’t speak light of her, please, sir.’ And for the third time Sam’s countenance fell—this time lower than ever.

He soon recovered his cheerfulness, however. ‘Folks says it’s no use cryin’ over spilt milk, and it’s sillier to begin to cry before you’re sure the milk is spilt. I’ll go up to see aunt, Sunday after next. She’ll be glad to see me, I know, though we weren’t best friends when we parted. And mayhap she’ll be able to tell me something about Esther. It seems an age since I saw either of ‘em.

If 't 'adn't been for you, sir, I should have felt very lonely sometimes at the hospital. The hospital people were as kind as kind could be, but then there was nobody that had known me 'outside, 'cept you, to come to ask after me. Of course, I didn't expect Esther or old aunt to come. How should they? Neither of 'em knqwed I was in. And yet somehow I thought it was hard they didn't come—the two as I'd cared most for. Queer fancies you get when you're ill. You don't like to be left to the mercies of the hospital folk, however kind they may be—just as if you didn't belong to nobody. If I'd died, who was there to claim my body? Them young students, I suppose, would ha' had it to chop up into block ornaments, and then I should ha' been buried a bit in this coffin and a bit in that. It ain't a comfortin' thought to a sick man. He feels so tired that he don't like to think of the bits of him having to cut about in that fashion to get together again at the resurrection—let alone the choppin'. P'raps I shouldn't have felt it, but still it wasn't pleasant, to think you'd be carved by them larkin' young students, though some of 'em, I heard, were kind young fellers, and none of 'em meant any harm. They were away for their holidays mostly when I was in. But what's the good of talkin' about what never happened? Thank God, I'm out now, well and strong. And I thank you and your kind friend, sir, for gettin' me in, and every one was very kind to me when once I had got in; and now, please God, I'm goin' to go ahead in the baked-taty line, and p'raps I shall be able to 'give a lift to some poor chap as bad off as I was that afternoon when you come to Church Lane.'

At starting, Sam's expectations of success in the 'taty

line ' were not fulfilled. The weather was against him—it was not cold enough to create a wide demand for his hand, mouth, and stomach-warming dainties ; and then he had still to find out a good round or pitch. Late one Saturday I met him lugging home his still heavily-laden can through the muggy mizzle of a drearily dark and dripping, and yet uncomfortably warm, October night. Poor Sam's face looked very long when I recognised him in the dim light of a damp lamp, but he tried to brighten up when I spoke to him.

' Nothing to boast of, sir,' he said, in reply to an inquiry as to how he was getting on. ' But it shan't spoil my Sunday—there's plenty in there ' (nodding with somewhat rueful jocosity at his unemptied potato-can) ' to eat and to give away ; so I ought to be able to have a easy Sunday. There's hundreds worse off than me, poor things. Not that that's any reason, as I see, why a chap should be happy—because there's so many as isn't—but, at any rate, he didn't ought to grumble when he can get along anyhow.'

I asked Sam whether he had seen his lady-love, and he again became a ' knight of the sorrowful countenance,' as he answered—

' No, sir, not yet ; and I haven't seen Aunt Newman either. I should like to see the old woman again ; and I feel pretty sure Esther must ha' been to her to get to know whatever had become of me. But you see, sir, they were both so sure that I was to blame when I parted from 'em, that I don't like to go near 'em again till I can show 'em I'm making a honest livin' for myself, whatever master or anybody else could say against me.'

Business called me from London, and three or four weeks passed before I saw Sam Farrant again. It was on a Saturday night in November, not the normal clammy foggy November night, but a night canopied with a clear black sky, in which bright stars shot out and retracted their rays like wasps' stings, and with no fog to cloud it except the white vapour steaming from pulled-up horses' backs, shooting in sloped capital V's, with very curly flourishes, from horses' nostrils, and ascending from human mouths as if every man, woman, and child I met had taken to smoking to excess. Sam was out when I reached his lodgings, but I could tell that he had at last been doing well from the eagerly civil way in which his landlady ran up from her kitchen when she heard me asking her little daughter, who had 'answered the door,' about Sam. I had again committed the offence which had so angered the landlady the last time I called—of giving the 'house' knock instead of the 'three-pair back' knock; yet now my offence was not merely graciously condoned, but not the slightest reference even was made to the inconvenience of having 'a family disturbed, and made to be servants for them as didn't pay 'em wages, and 'ad to be looked arter sharp, or they wouldn't pay their rent, becos them as come to see 'em 'oodn't take the trouble to remember the right way to knock when they come arter 'em botherin'.' The landlady was now loud in her praises of '*Mr Farrant*.'

'He's a-doin' well now, sir,' she said, 'and I'm glad on it. 'Tain't long I've ever 'ad to wait for my rent, I'll say that, but it ain't pleasant not to feel sure on it, when *you're* a-payin' rent all the time, and must pay it, you un-

derstand, sir, or else be bundled out, and all your sticks gone. But Mr Farrant never got much behind, he didn't, and now he's doin' well, I know, and he may thank me for puttin' him up to where to pitch.'

I suspected that her share in Sam's prosperity was but small, and once more offended her by starting off to Sam's pitch as soon as she had told me where it was, instead of waiting to hear more of her prudent kindness in recommending it.

I found Sam at the corner between a long, narrow, brawling, many-lamped street market and the main thoroughfare into which it led. He was doing a roaring trade. 'All 'ot, all 'ot,' he chanted cheerfully, the burning charcoal sent out a comfortable red glow through the round holes of the fire-box slung beneath his can, the steam hissed merrily through the tiny escape-pipe. I began to understand Sam's 'leaning to the baked-taty line.' His customers were so numerous that he had to work his fingers with a conjuror's quickness. The half-penny was swept into his pouch in the twinkling of an eye, up and down went the lid of the can almost as rapidly; out came the great knobbly mealy potato; gaped for a second to swallow the dab of butter on the point of Sam's knife, and its pinch and sprinkling of seasoning; then to went the jaws again, and it was whisked over to the purchaser to roll about in his numbed hands, and then devour upon the spot, or else to be carried home as a warm supper. All the time Sam went on calling out 'All 'ot, all 'ot' in the cheeriest of tones, and whilst I watched him, a boy brought him a fresh batch of potatoes from the baker's, smothered in a blanket. Sam was so

busy that, fearing I should interfere with his custom, I was going away without speaking to him; had he not noticed me as he poured his warm avalanche of fresh stock into his can. He then became so urgent that I should taste his ware, that I could not resist his entreaties, and carried home in my pocket two of the finest potatoes he could pick out, carefully wrapped up in a bit of old newspaper he borrowed from a neighbouring stall. I had told Sam that I should look in upon him at his lodgings on the following afternoon, and found him there, dressed quite sprucely.

'Why, Sam,' I said, 'you must be making your fortune, from what I saw last night.'

'*Fortunes* isn't exactly to be made in the baked-taty line,' he answered with a grin, 'but a good livin's to be made out of it, thank God. I should have to keep a clerk to take the money if I always sold as you see me, sir, but it ain't often so good as that, sir. Still I've done uncommon well lately. Close upon three pound a week I've cleared two weeks running now, and very nigh two pound the week before. I can pay the kind gentleman back three pounds now, and will you have the goodness, sir, to tell him, with my best thanks and humble duty, that I hope to let him have the other two in a fortnight's time? It don't belong to me, and I'll be bound to say him and you will soon find out between ye some poor fellow that wants it a deal more than me now.'

I took the three pounds and promised to take the other two; first, because I think it is far better for those who have it to spare to lend than to give money to strugglers, who, with the aid of a little loan, can help themselves—gifts

too often demoralise, make willing paupers of the whilom bravely striving poor ; and, secondly, because I thought that the refunding of his five pounds might possibly do some good to the obstinately prejudiced personage whom Sam called the 'kind gentleman.'

This little business done, Sam and I chatted about the sermon he had heard in the morning. 'It was about the loaves and the little fishes,' said Sam, 'and a fine sermon it was. But I was so taken up with thinkin' about what I'd made last week that I couldn't help wishin' there was something about taties in the Bible. But I suppose they wasn't invented then, and yet there must have been taties in the world from the beginnin' of it, or else where could ourn have come from? It's queer there's nothing about taties in the Testament. Anyhow, I thank God for creatin' of 'em. It's a pleasure to sell 'em. They're such a fillin' comfort, specially with a nice dollop o' butter in 'em, to them as buys 'em.'

I asked Sam what kind of people dealt with him.

'Oh, all sorts, sir, young and old—the boys is very fond of a hot taty, only they often wants to toss me for it like the pies. Real respectable people on the sly for their suppers, and them as are just the other thing, them poor bad gals, when they're hard up, and such. I've a real live gentleman for a customer—leastways I'm sure he used to be a gentleman, and s'far as manners goes, he's a real gentleman now, though he's scarce a shoe to his foot. I do believe he hasn't tasted anything till he comes for his taty in the evening—he don't like to come by day. Up he slips, lookin' shamefaced like, and yet though he's always in a flurry and a hurry to be off, he always says

"If you please" and "Thank you," as if I was serving him to turtle-soup. And he's a kind-hearted man, too. You remember that old woman that flew at you in the lodgin'-house, sir? Well, *she's* found me out, and is very fond of coming cadgin' for taties. I give her one now and again, though she gets money somehow to spend on drink, and so she could buy food if she liked. But one night she got outrageous because I didn't give her two. There she kept on screamin' about her having known me when I was poor, and she was rich, and had done ever so much for me; and now I wouldn't give her a taty. She'd gone off for a bit, but she came back just as the poor gentleman was pocketin' his taty. Well, sir, out he pulled it, and gave it to her, and off she went without so much as a thankee; and he'd have lost his supper most like, and I should have lost a reg'lar customer, though he ain't a rich un, if I hadn't made him understand all about it. To clear my character, I made him take another taty, too, though he was more than 'alf unwillin', 'ungry as he was.'

I learnt also that Sam had another customer from Church Lane, a customer as regular as the poor gentleman, but more profitable. This was the 'screever,' who ever since he had discovered Sam's pitch had constantly patronised him liberally. Sam would have been very willing to treat the old scamp in return for his past kindness, but the screever had sternly refused gratuitous refreshment.

'I like your potatoes,' he had said, 'because they're the best I can get anywhere, and they're the handiest I can get for my supper where I'm staying now—so it's only common sense to buy them. You've nothing to thank

me for, so far. Perhaps I *was* kind to you formerly, but I have met with so little gratitude in the course of my chequered existence that when I do see a show of it, it staggers me. Perhaps I may not have done much to merit gratitude ; perhaps I may have done very much. Opinions differ, and it ill becomes a man to trumpet his own praises. There is only one thing I will ask of you, Sam. When you discover the identity of your anonymous benefactor, oblige me with his address. It will be for his benefit as well as mine—or rather, of the numerous objects, deserving objects, whom I shall be able to bring within the play of his most benevolent hose-pipe. I have no doubt that his benevolence would burst him if it could not find a vent, and, for his own sake as well as sufferers'—many sufferers whom I know, with unexceptionable vouchers of calamity and character—I wish to discover his address, were it only to thank him for justifying my belief in the innate goodness of human nature. *It is often buried, ~~sir~~—buried at a deuced depth, I must confess—but it is *there*, sir, if you only dig deep enough. How refreshing then to a rightly-constituted mind to find that it is to be met with on the surface, if the rightly-constituted mind could only find the place ! In the mean time, Sam, I shall eat your potatoes, because I relish them, and you must allow me to pay for them, Sam. It would be *infra dig.*—I am making no punning allusion to your stock in trade—for a professional man, a man of extensive acquirements, although in a pecuniary point of view, unfortunately, they have not secured the extensive acquisitions which, perhaps, they merited—to accept eleemosynary tubers from a prosperous street-seller, even though that profes-

sional man may possibly have slightly contributed to that prosperous street-seller's prosperity.'

Sam grinned again as he recited, to the best of his ability, the fluent speech which, to the best of my ability, I have reproduced from Sam's stammering report.

Sam was reverentially impressed by the screever's command of words; he felt very grateful to the screever for the kindness the screever had shown him; but still Sam could not help grinning as he gave his imperfect, but suggestive report.

'I can't make the man out,' said Sam. 'I'd let him eat taties till he bust, if he'd a fancy for 'em, and never charge him nothing. But he don't seem to want to do *me*, and he *was* very good to me—uncommon good—when I wanted it. So I'll speak of the man as I find him, as the song says. I suppose he wants to do somebody, but I can leave you to look after the kind gentleman that's been so good to me.'

As the afternoon had worn on, Sam had grown fidgety. Ever and anon he could not help letting his eyes blink, rather than turn, upon two or three parcels, in grocer's paper and twine, that were lying on his table. What he had told me of Aunt Newman and Esther on previous occasions enabled me to interpret his glances. I got up, and said—

'I see, Sam; you've made it up with Aunt Newman, and you want me to be off, that you may rush away to make tea for her and Esther.'

Sam blushed as well as grinned as he answered—

'Indeed, sir, you ain't a bit right about my wantin' to 'urry ye, and you ain't quite right about Esther either.

I've made it up with aunt, but I ain't quite sure about Esther. She's been at the almshouses asking about me, whenever she could get a evening out, aunt says, and she's promised to come to tea to-night, but I can't feel sure till I see her. I'm doin' well now, but it hasn't been for long, and it mayn't last long neither, and she's so many after her, and she's so genteel. Aunt says Esther cried when she told her how I'd been in the hospital and that, but then she turned up her nose when aunt told her that I'd taken to the baked-taty line, and was doin' well in it at last—three times as well as I was doin' in master's yard, when she talked as if she would have took me and chanced it. But then, you see, sir, them genteel gals don't like fancyin' their husbands must get their bread by shoutin' out-o'-doors. And Esther's very genteel, and she's got a good place. She'll be wanting a counter-jumper, I expect. I'm makin' three times as much now as most of them makes, and I'm twenty times more my own master; but there's no accountin' for young women's fancies. Becos them shopmen parts their hair down the middle, and has white hands just as if they'd never done a stroke o' work, and soft-soaps the gals to get 'em to buy, the gals think they're more of gentlemen than such as me. However, I must take my chance. I'm not goin' to give in. If Esther's meant for me, why I shall get her, and if she isn't, why I must do without her the best way I can—though it'll be a pull, I won't deny. But there, I ought to be ashamed of myself, sir, wastin' your time like this talkin' about sweetheartin'.

I walked down-stairs with Sam, and as soon as he had bidden me good-bye outside the door, he was off like a shot.

I saw him again in the course of the week, and found that the lovers were reconciled. Esther, however, had intimated a wish that Sam should find some other calling as speedily as possible—at any rate, give up the potato-selling before their marriage. ‘But I haven’t exactly promised that,’ said Sam. ‘I’d do a good deal to oblige her, as I ought, and if I can find anything as good, or even pretty nigh as good, I’ll give up the taty business, though I’ve taken to it so. But it would be silly to throw away a good living—where’d be the kindness of *that* to your wife? A woman’s a right to say she won’t have a man because she don’t like his business, but I don’t think she’ve a right, when she likes the man, to want him to change his business when he’s got a good one, just because she don’t think it genteel. Being genteel, won’t pay the baker’s bill. However, I’ve got through a deal worse troubles than that, thank God.’

On this occasion Sam refunded another pound; and although I happened to call upon him so early as the Wednesday in the following week, he was able then to pay back the last pound of the gift he insisted on considering a loan. With it he sent renewed thanks to the ‘kind gentleman,’ and then he asked *me* to do him a favour.

‘Esther’s coming to tea at aunt’s next Sunday again, and I should uncommon like you to see her, sir. I don’t think you’ll say I’ve any reason to be ashamed o’ my ch’ice. And you’ll do her, and aunt, and me very proud if you’d take a cup o’ tea with us on Sunday. Aunt was talkin’ about it last time I see her, and said she hoped whenever you was anywhere thereabouts, and wanted a

rest, you'd step in and sit down, and she'd make you a cup o' tea any time of the day, willin'.'

I accepted the invitation for the next Sunday afternoon, and asked Sam whether I might bring the 'kind gentleman,' if I could get him to come.

'I only wish you could, sir—shouldn't we be proud? It must do anybody good just to look at his kind face, I should say, sir.'

The recollection of this speech of Sam's amused me when I called at Mr ——'s on the following Saturday afternoon. His place of business had just closed for the week, but he was still in the counting-house, in a very bad temper, since he had just had a passage of words with one of his people.

'Well, what's brought *you* here?' was the uncereemonious inquiry with which he greeted me.

'I've come on business.'

'Then I wish you'd come in business hours.'

'But I've come to pay some money.'

'Oh!—didn't know you owed me any, or I should have asked you for it before now.'

When I told him all about the £5 and Sam Farrant, Mr —— at first flatly refused to believe me, maintaining that I had brought back the money because I could not help feeling ashamed of having diddled him out of it for such a scamp, or else as a blind to get him to give a good bit more to some of my rascals. I let him relieve himself by a good deal of this kind of talk without contradicting him, and then told my story over again. This time he did believe it to a certain extent, and this was his comment:—

'You say Farrant's very grateful to me, and so he ought to be—putting him in the way of earning £3 a week. A fellow that's been earning that every week, and has got no one but himself to keep, might have paid back the money long before this. I suppose you want me to think that he's mighty honest, but I'm not going to.'

I pointed out that Sam had only recently become a potato-seller; that since he had been one, £3 a week had been a very exceptional profit; and that he helped to support his aunt, and was looking forward to getting married. 'More fool he,' of course snarled Mr —, but the return of the money had manifestly staggered him. When I told him of the invitation we had both received to take tea at the almshouses next day, he still pished and pshawed; but though he would not own that he had been mistaken in his estimate of Sam's character, his curiosity had been piqued, and at last he said that he did not mind looking in on the old woman, if I would call for him.

When I called, Mr —'s temper had been calmed by Sunday quiet, a good unhurried dinner, and an after-dinner cigar. He joked about our expedition, but still he seemed to have been anticipating it as a mild excitement which would mitigate what was to him the dulness of the latter half of Sunday, when the heavily pleasurable business of his three-o'clock dinner had been despatched. A quarter-of-an-hour's walk brought us to the almshouses, a low little row of black brick houses, with little leaden-latticed windows and dully painted doors and shutters; a partially obliterated inscription setting forth the name of the donor and the particulars of the endowment on the

worn grey stone which was placed on the gable raised above the tiny window of the seventh of the thirteen cramped bedrooms. Sam, smart and blushing, answered my knock at No. 3. He looked very much astonished when he saw Mr —, and still more so when I introduced his late master as the 'kind gentleman.' The old woman made a great deal of the 'kind gentleman,' and when she found that he was also Mr —, she seemed half inclined to relapse into her old belief that Sam had been to blame for his dismissal.

Sam said honestly, 'I'm half ashamed to look at you, sir. Here I've been thinking hard of you for turnin' me off, and all the time it was you, sir, that got me looked after and put me in the way of earnin' a good living.'

I could see that Mr — was sorely tempted to assume the part of a noble benefactor; but, even if I had not been present, I think his sense of justice would have been too strong to suffer him to do that.

'No, no, Farrant,' he said; 'you did wrong in answering me as you did, but I did wrong, I'll own it, in turning you off. I soon found out that you didn't take that money, and I don't believe you ever wronged me of a penny; so you haven't much to thank me for that £5. Besides, you've paid it back. However, if you won't keep it, I must give it to your wife that is to be, to buy her wedding-dress.'

Up to this point pretty, blushing Esther had not made up her mind as to how she should regard the 'kind gentleman' and Mr — rolled into one; but now she, too, went over to his side.

When he had taken a cup of Aunt Newman's tea, and praised it with great condescension when asked, 'Is your

tea to your likin', sir?' Mr —— had quite recovered his self-complacency.

As we came away, he said to Sam in a somewhat *de haut en bas* tone of benevolence—

'You know, Farrant, I never had any fault to find with you until that unfortunate business happened. You can come back to the yard when you like. I can't offer you £3 a week to begin with, but take my word for it, you won't often make £3 a week by selling baked potatoes; besides, you can't go on selling baked potatoes all the year round. So think it over for a bit, and if you like to come back you can.'

And Mr —— walked homewards in a blissful state of self-conscious virtue.

If Sam had continued to prosper in the 'taty line,' perhaps he might have gone on thinking over his late master's offer until the baked-potato season closed in spring—and then, perhaps, Mr —— might have felt inclined to refuse to employ him—but long before winter was over Sam's potatoes ceased to sell as I had seen them selling; Esther became more urgent than ever that he should give up the nasty can of which he had been so proud; and Sam accordingly sold his plant at a sacrifice, and applied for re-admission into Mr ——'s service.

Esther and Sam are married now. Sam is still in Mr ——'s service, and though he does not get anything like £3 a week yet, he may get more than that in course of time: he is so civil and industrious, and his master is now, with good reason, so thoroughly convinced of his cheerfully loyal honesty.

Mr —— is both fond and proud of Sam, but—*because,*

perhaps, I should rather write—he takes to himself, professedly, almost the entire credit of the present relations between them. He tries hard to make himself and myself believe that, throughout, he was Sam's discerning, disinterestedly generous, friend. Sometimes he endeavours to impress this view on Sam. At any rate, however, Sam's return to his yard has made him both less hasty to suspect and less obstinate in cuddling his suspicions ; so that it has done good to Mr —— and his other *employés*, as well as to Sam.

As for Sam, *he* says that he always said that the master was a good master, when he worn't put out. If Mrs Sam, who, in spite of the wedding-dress, thinks that Mr —— has got too easily over the great crime of ever doubting her husband's honesty, objects, ' But he turned you off for nothing, Sam,' Sam rejoins with a grin, ' But the master don't like to look at it in that light, you see, Esther, and I've not a mite of fault to find with him now. I've got a good place, though it ain't near equal yet to the taties at their best o' times ; but it'll soon be better, most like, than what it is now, and it's certain, you see, Esther. After all, it don't matter much who thinks you're a thief so long as God knows you ain't. Mostly, I fancy, it's soon found out what you are ; but if it ain't, you've the comfort o' knowin' you're judged elsewheres.'

VI.

HOPPETY BOB



IN the wilderness of dingy brick on the Surrey side of the Thames there is a short cut from one street to another, called, if I remember rightly, Raymond's Folly. Raymond, I suppose, was the builder of the houses, but why they should have been thought to indicate mental weakness in their designer any more than the vast majority of the others in the neighbourhood, it would be hard to say. *Primâ facie*, the builders of all might be considered fools, for no human beings, one might fancy, could be got to kennel in such cramped holes. Their crowded condition, however, proves that those who constructed them were keen students of the laws of supply and demand. Hurrying through the Folly on one occasion, for the sake of its short-cut, I could not, in spite of my haste, help stopping for a moment to glance at a couple of pictures, as Hogarthian in their contrast as any two depicting the careers of Tom Idle and Francis Goodchild. The frames were the open doorways of two adjoining houses.

In one room a hulking bricklayer's labourer, powdered with white dust on his unkempt hair, bristly beard that had not been mown for a fortnight, and lime-splashed clothes that were never doffed to go to church, was lifting his heavy head and shoulders, like Dr Watts's sluggard, from the rickety table on which they had been sprawled—a table slopped with beer, and littered with the fragments of a broken pipe. His stupidly-glazed eyes—the orbit of one of them puffed and purple from a recent blow—showed that he had had a good deal more than enough beer already; but he had roused himself into semi-consciousness to growl a sleepy curse, and shake a cowardly fist at his wife, because she did not go at once to fetch him 'another pot.' It was no wonder that even she, poor, pinched, tattered, terrified creature, plucked up courage to linger for a moment with the broken-lipped jug in her hand. A baby was hanging at her skinny breast, and two or three scared, half-starved little ones were tugging at her scanty skirts. When children are whimpering to mammy for bread, and yet the lazy bread-winner insists on having beer, a woman must find it hard work to keep her vow to 'love, honour, and obey.' What a mockery the Marriage Service must seem to her—and the dreams she had when she listened to it, arrayed in abnormal splendour, and bashfully returning the fond glances of 'her new lord, her own, the first of men,' looking as smart as any gentleman, and even more loving than in the earliest days of their 'keeping company.' When an Australian black fellow wants to marry, he stuns his coveted bride with his 'waddy.' It would be kinder if some of our white fellows adopted this mode of courting with the

cidgel—they would not have so much chance of breaking bones and hearts after marriage.

In the other room—propped up with a patchwork pillow in a wicker arm-chair, something like a frontless and roofless blackbird's cage—sat a dwarf. He was deformed as well, and one leg hung springless and shivelled as a broken, withered twig. There were traces of past, as well as twitches of present, pain, in his drawn face; and yet it looked not only intelligent, but cheerfully benevolent. A musk plant, trained on a fan frame of Lilliputian laths, stood on his window-shelf, and above it hung a linnet in a cage. A bird-fancier only (*teste* the Spitalfields bird-market) is often a big blackguard. But wherever you see birds *and* flowers you may be pretty sure that the tenant of the house or room is of a gentle disposition. The musk plant and the linnet were no deceptive signs. Whilst the cripple plied his long, lithe fingers amongst the little gallipots of paint, the little wooden winches, and the little stiff wooden men, with wire-articulated limbs, with which, instead of shattered pipe-stem, *his* table was littered—he listened to a little class of scholars, squatted on the floor like young Orientals, and spelling out, from an old Bible passed from hand to hand, the first chapter of St John. Every now and then, too, he looked up to laugh and nod at a chirping, gurgling toddler, tethered to his chair with an old red bell-rope, like a grazing kid; a chubby little toddler, whose cheeks, it must be confessed, were more than sufficiently begrimed, but still too fresh from God's hand to have been distorted by man's into the harsh angularity, or flattened blur of feature, that generally characterises the Folly's youth.

The friend to whose lodgings I had taken the short-cut through the Folly, had charge of the 'Mission District' in which it stands. When I mentioned to him what I had seen, 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'I know him well—a most worthy little fellow. He makes me think sometimes of what Bacon says, "Whosoever hath anything fixed in his person that doth induce contempt, hath also a perpetual spur in himself to rescue and deliver himself from scorn." It's a better spur than that, though, the little man has got. I believe that the love of God is so shed abroad in his heart that it runs over with love upon others. He's the peacemaker of that terrible place he lives in, and it's astonishing how many ways he finds, feeble as he is, to help his neighbours. You're almost always sure to find a swarm of children in his place. He looks after them for their mothers, and teaches them to read when he can get the chance. A good many of the women there are a sad set, but they've a great respect for poor little "Hoppety Bob"—that's the name he's known by. They'd clean out his room, or cook his food for him any day, and sometimes, when he is worse than usual, he *is* obliged to let them take his work to the shop, or do something of that kind. But he's a very independent little fellow, and hops about on his crutch like a sparrow. He's making penny toys now, but he's been all kinds of things. If you'd like to have a chat with him, I'll take you round some evening. Mind, though, that you don't offer him any money. He isn't like other folks. I declare to you that, when I have no money to give them, I often feel inclined to skip calling on some of my poor people. It seems such mockery to preach patience to them, when they are cold, and

hungry, and naked, without doing anything to help them—to speak about God's love, without showing any of it in man's aid. But you would only offend Bob by offering *him* money.'

On a sultry summer evening, about a week afterwards, I found myself with my friend at the entrance of the Folly. A thunder-cloud hung over the whole of London, and in that wretched place the air was oppressively hot and close. Men and boys lolled against the posts, listlessly smoking, and almost too languid and ill-tempered to stand aside and let us pass. The women sat on the doorsteps, with their feverish faces resting on their up-drawn knees, embraced by weary arms. Fractious children were wrangling on the pavement. From lines, stretched from side to side above it, drooped clothes whose motionless moistness did not freshen the hot, hushed air. The women seated on the common doorstep of the house in which Bob lodged, gave my companion a very sulky 'good evenin', sir,' as they dragged up their tired limbs to make way for us. Bob's door opened just inside the common lobby, and when we knocked at it, it was a pleasant change to hear his cheery 'Come in.' He had pushed his chair to the open window, and was chipping away in the fading light at one of his little men.

'What are you so busy about, Bob?' asked the clergyman.

'Well, sir,' he answered, 'perhaps you'll laugh, but somebody says there's sermons in stones, and good in everything; and I've been thinking that there might be texts in toys; anyhow, there shouldn't be any bad in 'em. After that blackguard fight at Farnbro', you know, sir,

Sayers and Heenan were all the rage, and my shop got me to make them for the children. You turned the handle, you see, and then they squared up along the slit, and pitched into one another. It was rather a pretty bit o' work, and took with the little uns.uncommon. I never thought about any harm there could be in it till yesterday. The bricklayer man next door was settin' two young uns to fight, so I told 'em to stop it. "You're a nice un to preach about fightin'," says he, "why, you teach 'em!" "I!" says I. "Yes," says he. "How?" says I. "With yer whirligigs," says he. That struck me all of a heap like, and I'm trying to make Sayers and Heenan a-shaking hands, but Tom's an obstinate feller, and won't lift his arm quick enough. I expect I shall have to make out that it's on account of the rap the American give him. Isn't it strange, sir, that it's so much easier to make even a bit of wood do what it oughtn't?"

All this time my introduction was delayed, but I was well content to wait whilst I listened to the mingled earnestness and humour with which the crippled toy-maker unfolded his difficulty. There was something pleasant in his voice. For one thing, he neither dropped nor lavished his *h*'s, although, having lived all his life amongst the lower class of Londoners, it would have been impossible for him to avoid catching some Cockneyisms.

'Well, sir,' he said, as we sat together after my introducer had departed; 'so you want to know how a poor lamester like me has managed to rub on. I don't see what pleasure it can give you to hear about a nobody, but you should know best. But first let's light a bit of candle. When I'm alone, I like to sit a bit in the dark—you can think

plainer, I fancy—but it seems unsociable like when you're talkin' to a friend, if you'll excuse me, sir. I'm a Colchester man by birth. Yes; sir, I was born just as I am—let's see, it must be close on fifty years ago. My father was a lighterman at the Hythe. Poor old father! He's been in St Leonard's churchyard this many a year—but he *did* whop me cruel. You see, sir, he was disappointed at getting a poor thing like me. He wanted a hearty lad to bring up to his own trade; and I deserved the drubbin's sometimes, too, for I was a young limb in those days. I was talking about fightin' just now—if you'll believe me, sir, cripple as I was, I'd fight any boy that 'ud go down on his knees to me to bring our heads level and give me a chance. The Almighty knew my spirit, and so, I believe, He was pleased to make me as I am to keep me out of temptation. It was the drubbin's father gave mother hurt me far worse than my own. Though I often grieved her with my ways, dear soul, I always loved her, for she was always good to me. She taught me to read my Bible and to say a prayer, and tried to get father to ask for me to be put in the Bluecoat School in Maidenburgh Street. He could easily have got me in, but he couldn't read or write himself, and so he swore at mother for teachin' me. She went to the Round meeting, too, and though he never went to church himself, he couldn't abide her being a Pogram—that's what some of the silly folks used to call a meetin'er in those parts. And then, when he was very drunk, he'd abuse poor dear mother just as if it was *her* fault I was born so. I remember one Saturday evening, when I had just turned eight, mother had coaxed me not to go hippety-hopping

down to the quay to lark about the coal-sheds with the young rascals that used to get down there at night, but to stay at home with her. Father was at the Whitby Packet, or the Seven Bells, or some such place, and mother had swep' up the hearth, and sanded the kitchen, and brushed my hair, and there we sat readin' and talkin' together for ever so long, as comfortable as could be. I can remember one of the chapters we read that night—though, deary me ! what a time ago it seems—for there was “if, therefore, ye being evil,” in it. I used to pride myself on being sharp in those days, and so says I to mother, “What a precious evil father I've got then, for he never gives me nothing but whacks.” I wish I'd never said sharp things about father to poor mother, for they always made her cry. She was crying and sayin', “It isn't for you to speak against him, Bob. Honour thy father—” when in he came. Mother had kep' me up longer than she meant, and he'd come home earlier than usual, in a fury of a temper about something. As soon as he saw us, he began to storm at mother for wasting his fire and candle—though, how we should have lived without mother's washing, I don't know—poor old father used to drink away almost the whole of his wages. “And blubberin' over your Methodist rubbish,” he went on with a swear. And then he bundled us both out of doors, and chased us up the hill. We turned into the churchyard to get out of his way, and there we waited for him to quiet down. It was a sharp, frosty night. There used to be five stone heads, sir, sticking out of the gratin' just above the porch, and there was a tale about 'em. In the old times, folks said, four men broke in to steal the church plate, and so the parsons

locked 'em up there to starve ; and a baker chucked 'em up a loaf, and so they locked him up, too ; and when they were all dead, they stuck five stone images out of the belfry to scare folks. Thank God, we've got a different sort of parsons now-a-days. Well, sir, I remember just as if it was yesterday, seein' the moonshine on the frost on the stone heads—they looked as bald and as shiny as the churchwarden's. After a bit we went back, and heard father a-snoring ; so we crept in. But mother had got her death in the churchyard. She took a cold that settled on her lungs, and she was back in the churchyard afore Christmas. "God bless you, my dear Bob !" she said to me the day she died. "He will if you ask Him. Read your Bible, and try to be of some good, though it's pleased Him as knows best to make you as you are." And then she clutched my face up to hers in her two hands, and burst out cryin' ; and those are the last words I ever heard my poor dear mother say.

'I shall tire you, though, sir, talking on in this way. But, hark, how the rain *is* coming down ! You must stop any how till this storm is over.

'Well, sir, I tried to be a good boy, for poor dear mother's sake. But father treated me worse and worse. He pitched mother's Bible into the fire when he caught me reading of it, and pushed it down with the poker till the leaves were 'most like tinder ; but I got some of the middle ones out when he was gone, and I've got 'em now. They are like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, though the smell of fire had passed upon 'em. Well, sir, father drubbed me, and never give me half enough to eat—sometimes he wouldn't give me anything. The neighbours

gave me a bit of bread now and then, but, of course, they couldn't be expected to keep me, when my father was a hearty man earnin' good wages ; and, besides, I hadn't pretty looks and ways to take the women's hearts. I was worse off than if I'd had no father, for then the parish must have took me. I thought it wasn't game to cry, but I couldn't help it when I've gone to poor mother's grave, and wished myself snug inside along with her. Some of the lads on the quay were sad prigs, and they've put me up to steal rope, and copper nails, and things, and slip down into the cabins to prig prog ; but if my earthly father didn't look after me, my Heavenly Father did, and, I'm thankful to say, I never was a thief—though a boy's hungry belly is a sore tempter, sir. Perhaps, if I'd have had the use of my pins as they had, I might ha' done it—if so, I thank God for makin' me a cripple—but I *hope* not. I used to fancy that my mother was a-watchin' of me. "Try to be of some good, Bob," I used to hear her say, and, as well as such a poor little crittur could, I made up my mind that I would try. Anyhow, however, I couldn't stand home any longer. I must be off somewhere to fend the best I could for myself. I'd sense enough to guess that father 'ud bring me back if I hung anywheres about Colchester. I wanted to be off to London. I'd heard that all sorts o' folks could get work there. Not as I thought that it was paved with gold—children—poor folks' kids, anyhow—ain't green enough for that. I had talked about London sometimes to a man who drove a fish machine—it was long before the Eastern Counties' was thought of, the times I'm speakin' of. "Well, Bob," says he, one day, "you

couldn't be worse off there than you are here, and if you can manage to hobble out, quite unbeknown to your father, mind—for I shouldn't like him to fancy that I'd any hand in it—to the third milestone on the London road, I'll take you up to-morrow evening." I went to bid poor mother good-bye that night—her grave somehow makes me think that Colchester's my home down to this very day, though I've never set foot in it since—and next mornin', as soon as I'd seen father off in his lighter polin' down the river to Wivenhoe, I slipped back and packed up a few of my clothes that he hadn't pawned, and my Bible-leaves, and a Mavor's Spelling-book my mother used to learn me out of, in a brown Holland linen-bag of hers, and began to hippety-hoppet down Hythe Hill. I went a roundabout way to throw father off the scent. "Where are you goin', Bob?" says a woman. "For a walk," says I, "and I shall be hungry before I come back." She looks hard at me, but then she says, "Poor little chap," and goes in and cuts me a slice of bread and butter. I went along the river till I got to the New Quay, but then I turned up by the distillery, and so worked round into the Military Road. I was precious tired by the time I got to the old Soldiers' Burial-Ground. They've got a camp at Colchester again now, but there were no soldiers in my time. There was a barrack-field with great, tarry palings, and this burial-ground, where they'd taken up the tomb-stones, to be out of the cows' way, and leaned them against the hedges. I climbed in, and ate my bread and butter, and then I went over John's Green and Cook's Fields, and cut across the Butt Road and Maldon Road, and got to Lexden across

the fields behind the hospital. It's queer how I remember all them places—jest as if I was pegging over them now. I had another long rest at Lexden Springs. A ladies' school went by whilst I was sittin' by the half-moon pond at the top, and one of the young ladies said, "Poor little object," and gave me a Bath bun out of her muff, and another of 'em gave me a penny with a harp on it. But I shall never get done if I go on at this rate, sir. Hows'ever, it's still rainin'.

'The machine-man took me up at the milestone, and I came up to London, bumpin' in a sack on the top o' Colchester natives. He gave me something to eat on the road, and next mornin' he dropped me at an early coffee-house in the Mile-En' Road, and give me a shilling, and said "Good-bye, Bob : luck go with ye ;" and ever since then, sir, I thank God, I've been able to earn my own living—'cept when I've been laid up in hospital, and that's about ten times in forty years. They're good Christian places, those hospitals, when you're once inside ; and the doctors, and the nurses, and the ladies—sisters, they call 'em—there weren't any o' *them* when I used to be laid up first—are as kind as kind can be. The doctors speak a bit brisk now and then, and the nurses make you mind 'em ; but then think what a lot they've got to look after ! and the ladies are always so gentle, bless 'em ! It's a pity, though, that the porters and such-like should be so bumptious : they might have, you'd think, more feeling for poor folk. Of course, you understand, sir, I'd rather pay a doctor, if I could ; but then I can't, and, besides, how could I keep a nurse ? So when I'm bad, I go to a kind gentleman I know, and he always manages to get me

an order somewhere or other. I declare to you, sir, I've been downright happy in hospital when I've been gettin' a bit well again. So clean and quiet, no bad smells, and no bad language, and time to think good thoughts—it's like a week o' Sundays—very different from the Sundays *here*, sir. It was in Guy's, sir, that poor mother's words first really come home to me. Just before I was laid up, I'd been getting cocky—sacrificin' unto my net, and burnin' incense to my drag. I'd been thinking that, cripple as I was, I'd managed to get my livin', and keep myself respectable, and pick up a bit of book-learnin' about beasts, and birds, and flowers, and mechanics, and such-like, better than some big fellows who could make a mouthful of me. It was real good for me to be laid on the flat o' my back that time—it took the nonsense out of me. I was lying in my bed one night, feelin' very small, when all of a sudden I thought of poor mother lying on her bed, and of what she'd said to me, "Try to be of some good, Bob." And, thinks I, if you'd *been* the fine feller you fancied yerself, after all, wasn't you only workin' *for* yerself? If you was to die to-night, who'd be worse off *but* yerself? I'd given up saying my prayers and going to church for a bit, but I said a prayer that night, and made up my mind that, if ever I got about again, God helpin' me, I'd try to do somebody besides myself some good. But what good could a chap like me do to anybody? I thought again. However, the first Sunday I was out, I went to church—the one that stands back in the Blackfriars Road—and the sermon was just as if the parson knew what I was thinking. It was about the cup of cold water, you know, sir. Thinks I, it's hard if

I can't give *that*, and I've tried since to do the little I can that way, and I was never so happy before. How folks can make a merit of works, I can't make out. It's precious little anybody can do, and then for the very littlest thing you do you get such a lot of pleasure that it seems somehow as if you was only shamming to be kind to get somethin' for yerself—throwin' away a sprat to catch a salmon like.

'But I haven't told you how I've got my living? That's true, sir, and really I don't see that there's much to tell. I've only done what everybody that hasn't got tin's forced to do, if he doesn't want to starve, or to steal, or turn cadger, or go into the workus. I've been at the toy-making off and on for about five year now. The pay's light, but so's the work, so far as strength goes, and that suits me now, for I'm gettin' shaky. It's a pretty kind of work, too, I reckon. There ain't much room for taste, it's true, but it wants a little bit of gumption sometimes to manage the strings and things. Anyhow, I like it, and try to make 'em the best I can. It's nice somehow to think that I'm makin' playthings for poor folks' kids that can't get anything better. I've got queer fancies sometimes, sir. I wonder whether Christ, when he was a carpenter, ever made anything out of the chips for the little uns that peeped into the shop? There's no sin in fancyin' that, is there, sir? He was so fond of children that I can't help thinkin' he'd ha' done anything that was right to please 'em.

'What did I do before? Bless your heart, sir, I've been a Jack of all trades, 'cept a navvy, and a coalheaver, and such like. I used to see a good bit of coal-heavers

once, though. My second master went about in the Pool selling hot beer to the sailors. We was run down in a fog one day, and the poor old man was drowned. They hooked me out on to a steamer, and put me ashore at Greenwich. I couldn't help crying a bit, for I'd lost all except my Bible leaves and the clothes I stood in. So the mate pitched me an old broom, and told me to go and fight for a crossing. I got one without fightin', however, on Maze Hill, and made a pretty good thing of it; but I used to lodge in Mill Lane—by Deptford Broadway, you know, sir—and one night the tramps cleaned me out. My first place was to clean boots and knives at the coffee-house where the machine-man put me down. I've sold watercresses, and walnuts, and lark turfs, and gr'un'sel, and such-like; but I never took much to those out-door things—they didn't seem respectable. I thought I *was* getting up in the world—I was about thirteen then—when an old fellow who kept a second-hand bookshop in the Goswell Road hired me to sit inside and watch the books. He didn't give me much wages, but I got lots to eat, and a good bit of reading too on the sly. I'm afraid now it wasn't quite right: but I couldn't help it when I'd got the chance, and, after all, he never lost anything by me. Only one man ever tried it on. He whipped a book off the shelf, and was walkin' away pretty brisk, but I hopped after him a bit faster. "You haven't paid for the book, sir," says I. "What book, boy?" says he. "The book you've got in your pocket, sir," says I. He puts in his hand and pulls it out, and then he says, "Why, so I have—what strange absence o' mind!" and gives it me in a kind of maze like. P'raps, after all, he wasn't a thief,

though I thought so then, and the looks of the thing were against him. One sees so many strange things as one gets older that we ain't so ready to condemn folks for the bad looks of things. Leastways it's been so with me, and it's nicer than being so mighty sharp that one can't believe one's own mother. Charity thinketh no evil. If we'd got a little more of that, and there wasn't no evil to be thought about neither, what a nice world this would be, sir! But that's foolish talk—as if we could manage matters better than He does. Well, sir, since I got that billet at the bookseller's I've always managed to keep myself by some indoor work or other—except, of course, when I've been in hospital. It was when I'd got a folding job at a stationer's over in Finsbury, that I heard of poor old father's death. I was sixteen or seventeen then, and had got a few shillings put by. I'd been thinkin' that, hard as he'd been, he was my father after all, and my mother had loved him, though he did whop her, and that it wasn't right to take no more notice of him than if he'd been a dog. So I was a-goin' to write down to him, and if I found he was hard up, to send him a crown or so. I dare say there was a bit of pride in that—I wanted to show him that I'd been able to get on without him. I've mostly found there was summut o' that in anything I've been very proud of. Well, sir, the very night I was goin' to write, as I hopped home from work, thinkin' what a good son I was, and all that, I ran against one of the porters in the yard. He didn't know me, but I knew him as soon as I set eyes on him. He was a Colchester man that used to live in Magdalen Street. Well, sir, I asked him about my father, and he told me that he was dead and

buried. He'd walked off the quay one Saturday night, and was half drowned in the water, and half smothered in the mud. It give me a turn, as you may think, sir. I wished I could spend the money I was goin' to send him as the Catholics do. I can't bear to think of it now. The thief on the cross is my only comfort when I do think about it. But, perhaps, we're too ready to judge. Judge not, that ye be not judged—that's another comfort.'


The poor cripple was silent for a minute or two after this, but then he went on in his old cheerful voice—'But the rain's over, and you'll want to be going. I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for givin' me your company so long. No, sir, thankee, there's nothing you can do for me. I've everything I want—enough and to spare. I've got work as long as I've got my health; and when that fails, I've got my hospital; and when I die, I humbly hope, through Christ's mercy, to creep into heaven. I've everything to make me contented. The curate talks to me like a brother, sir. I've only to ask my othe^r good friend for an order for the hospital, and he gets it for me just as if I was a gentleman. The little ones all love me, and most of the people about here are very kind. If they'd only be a little kinder to themselves, poor souls, I should be quite happy. Do you know, sir, I call my old chair here my Ebenezer? Hitherto the Lord hath helped me, and He's a friend that will never fail. Good night, sir, and again I thank ye.'

As I picked my way through the rain-pools of the Folly's flags, and thought of the little toy-maker, heartily grateful after weed-like tossings on life's sea for even that poor shelter, and, in spite of his infirmities, not only earn-

ing for himself an honest living, but acting as a moral leaven and even a material benefactor to his poor neighbours, it occurred to me that 'the bricklayer man next door' was not the only lazy man, or woman, whom my lame man should make ashamed. Contrasted with his beneficent energy under difficulties, how utterly contemptible appears the *ennui* that springs from 'nothing to do' in the midst of life's most luxurious appliances !

VII.

HOPPETY BOB'S CHRISTMAS TREAT.

S one gets old, present Christmas festivities are chiefly enjoyable as reminders of merrier Christmas meetings in the past—unless there are children amongst the guests, in whose unblunted fun one can get child-like enjoyment by proxy. As I sat at a childless table during the just past Christmas, with middle-aged and old people about me making-believe to be merry in a languidly elephantine fashion—‘joking’ over mince-pies which they could only nibble like mice, through dread of dyspepsy—I remembered, half-regretfully, a Christmas night I once spent in Raymond’s Folly.

Our common friend the curate had told me that Hoppety Bob intended to give a Christmas treat to his pupils, and I had obtained Bob’s permission to be present at it. The independent little fellow, however, stipulated that I should be present only as a guest. I might help him wait upon the children, if I would be so kind, but I must not

contribute, pecuniarily, to their entertainment. He had saved up a few shillings for his feast, and wished to have the pleasure of playing sole Amphitryon. 'Some of the fathers and mothers,' he added apologetically, 'will look in, perhaps, and they'll take it kinder of you to look in like one of themselves, than if you come to help to pay. Poor folks—some poor folks, that is—like to have money giv' 'em, but they like, too, to feel as if those who've got a bit more money than themselves didn't come amongst 'em jest to giv' 'em money, as you might give a hungry dog a bone. We're all children of the same God, ain't we, sir? and if He's giv' more to some than t'others, that's no reason why they should look down on them as is worse off, as if they wasn't the same flesh and blood. You'll excuse me, sir—I know you don't think the worse of me because I don't make much and live in a place like this—but you'll understand, sir, that I'd rather give the little uns their feed myself, an' that we shall all on us be very proud if you'll come an' take your tea with us.'

Six o'clock P.M. was the hour at which Hoppety Bob had invited his Christmas guests to assemble. Of course, I took care to get to the Folly at six sharp. It was one of the dreary Christmas nights so common in London—cold with a marrow-freezing drizzle. In spite of cork-soles and brisk walking, the sticky mud on the pavement turned one's feet to ice. The blazing publics were the only bright things to be seen, and, crammed as they were with half-drunken brawlers, theirs was a very dismal brightness. Quite drunken unfortunates were howling snatches of song, and cannoning off from almost every foot-passenger they passed as they waltzed with one another on the miry

side-paths. Roughs were loafing about, rejoicing in the thickening fog. Tall black policemen were standing at corners, glancing up and down ; and stolidly meditating, perhaps, on the small amount of merriment to be found in a London constable's Christmas.

In the Folly, as elsewhere, the inhabitants had taken more beer than was good for them (however they might have fared for beef), but Bob's little entertainment was acting outside as well as inside as a promoter of goodwill. 'There's a swell come to Hoppety's tea-squall,' said the bricklayer's labourer with a grin, but he said it with less than his usual crustiness. His own poor little ones were going to take tea at the dwarf's, and, since the treat would cost him nothing, he was graciously pleased to regard their unwonted enjoyment with as much complacency as if he had given it to them.

Bob's room was crammed with youngsters : far more had come to his tea than generally came to his teachings. The guests had brought their own seats—those of them, that is, who had seats. The majority squatted wherever they could find sitting-room, like a swarm of frogs. The Folly had also contributed a curiously composite tea-service of cracked mugs, cups, and saucers—the last also to be used as drinking vessels. Tea had been made in the big black kettle—another loan—that brooded on the glowing fireplace like a black swan upon its nest. The 'cheeks' of the grate had been taken out, but still the kettle covered the whole fire. Bob had just finished cutting bread-and-butter, and sat at his table between two piles of it that almost overtopped his head. He smiled a welcome as he sat there like a ticket-clerk at his pigeon-

hole, and beckoned me to a seat^f of honour which he had reserved for me at his right hand.

‘Now then, children,’ said Bob, ‘stand up, an’ let’s sing a blessin’.’ Up the little things jumped, and managed to stammer after him, in often-extemporised tune and time, and syllables also,—

‘Be present at our table, Lord,
Be here and everywhere adored ;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we
May feast in Paradise with Thee.’

‘Now then,’ Bob went on, ‘here’s the grub ; so come an’ help yourselves ; an’ let the littlest uns come first. Don’t be shamefaced ; p’r’aps I can find some more when that’s gone. And now, sir, p’r’aps you’d kindly help me pour out the tea, an’ then we’ll have a cup ourselves. I’d have had my pot out for you, but I thought you’d like to take it with the kids.’

So Bob put the brown sugar and the blue milk into the motley equipage, and I poured in the tea, and the children nearest the table passed it on to their fellows, and for some minutes the room was like a stable—there was such a loud champing of fodder, and a horse-like drinking.

Tea over, greasy little lips gratefully sung,—

‘We thank thee, Lord, for this our food,
But more because of Jesus’ blood ;’

and then the table and the tea-things were pushed into a corner, and Bob proposed a game of blind-man’s buff. Bob volunteered to be blinded first, and pegged about on his crutch like a parched pea. Some of the children had never seen the game played before, but they soon entered into it, and pulled away at the dwarf’s coat-tails merrily, taking care, however, not to pull *too* hard. He caught

them by the armful every minute, but always let them go again, because the little man had made up his mind to catch me. I was soon hemmed in a corner, and bandaged. I was spun round, and *my* coat was almost pulled off my back ; for, as soon as the youngsters had got rid of their shyness (and they were not long in doing that), they exulted greatly in having found so big a play-fellow, and buzzed about me like bees about a bear.

Then we had a game at hunt-the-slipper, in which Bob again delighted the children by his agility and cleverness, catching the slipper in mid-air, and dragging it out of the slyest hiding-places.

An interval of five minutes for a refreshment of an orange a-piece followed, and then came *the* treat of the evening. 'Now, children, I'm going to show you what I expect you've never seen afore,' said Bob, with consequential mystery. (He had borrowed a cheap magic-lantern from the shop for which he worked.) 'P'raps, sir, you'll be kind enough to help me up with the sheet?' When it was up, and the candles were out, and the fire had been shaded, and a mystic circle of light, with dim figures chasing one another, through what looked like gaslit fog, began to bob up and down on the sheet, the children sat with hushed breath, and the grown-up neighbours crowded the window and the doorway. A rumour had run like wildfire through the Folly that 'Hop-pety was a-makin' ghosteses.'

He got his focus at last, but at no time were the figures free from blurred outlines ; they were clear enough for recognition, however, ere long, and then it was hard to say which were the more pleased, the men and women, or the children. They roared equally over the funny slides,

which Bob illustrated with a quaint running comment. He had chosen others that were specially adapted to Christmas ; and he preached pretty little sermons on them, as he pushed his gaudily painted texts across the sheet.

‘ That’s the star in the east a-shinin’ up above them palms. The oil’s bad, an’ I can’t make it shine as I should like. My talkin’s somethin’ like that. I want you to love what’s right ; but, you see, Hoppety’s oil ain’t first-rate, an’ so he can’t make you see things as plain as he would do. That’s the star, an’ them in the long beards an’ the blue an’ red an’ yellow gowns, with the things like sheets twisted round their heads, is the wise men as have come all the way from the East to see if they can find Jesus. If wise men like them wanted Him, an’ took all that trouble, you may be sure you want Him ; for you ain’t wise men, are you ? but little boys and gals that might be a deal wiser. And yet He’ll let you find Him without a bit of trouble, if you only want to. He loved everybody as nobody ever loved them afore, but He seems to have been partic’lar fond of little boys an’ gals. Some on ye has read about that with me—“ Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not,” you know—an’ now I’ll show you a pictur’ about it. That’s the disciples a-shovin’ the kids away ; they meant well, but they didn’t know no better, though they was such good men. An’ that’s the Blessed Jesus smilin’ so sweetly, with that sun like round his head. It ’ud be a poor pictur’ of His dear face, if the light was ever so good. But that don’t matter much. There’s some beautiful faces of Jesus you can see, when you get a bit bigger, in the Nashnal Gallery—out West-end way ; but there ain’t one that won’t seem but what it could be beautifuller

if you've got to love Jesus. Do you read about Jesus in the Testament, an' try to copy what He said an' did. That's the best pictur' of Him anybody can dror. It'll be a poor thing, after all, like this here ; but you can keep on rubbing out, an' tryin' to make it a bit more like.

'An' now I'll show you the stable where Jesus was born, an' put into the manger for a cradle. It looks pretty in the pictur', with the hay, and the donkeys, and the bullocks, an' the smart dresses ; but I expect it was only a poor sort of place. If the Prince of Wales had been born in the Folly, folks wouldn't ha' believed as he *was* the Prince of Wales ; so it ain't much to be wondered at that them as expected Christ to come into the world with a crown on His head, like, wouldn't believe there could be much in a poor carpenter's son, born in a stable. But yet there He was—just as you might find a sovereign in the mud, an' fancy it only a farden, till you come to change it—that is, if the folks you took it to was honest. If they *was* honest, though, p'r'aps they'd think *you* wasn't, an' wouldn't give you change. It ain't like that with Jesus Christ. The poorest child as ever was has got a right to lay hold of Him, an' can get full vally for Him.

'An' here's Joseph and Mary an' Jesus, a-goin' down into Egypt. They went there, you know, because Herod wanted to kill Jesus afore He'd done what He was sent to do. Don't that sound silly? An' here's Herod's soldiers killin' the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under ; an' the poor mothers cryin' as if their hearts would break. That's hard, ain't it? But, p'r'aps, some of them poor little kids would ha' called out "Crucify Him," if they'd been left to grow up ; an' God loved 'em so that He

wouldn't giv' 'em the chance to go wrong. Though I'm fond o' you, an' I think you like me a bit, I know I'd rather see you dead as you are, than gettin' big boys and gals to learn bad ways.

'An' now I'll show you my last pictur', and I think it's one o' the prettiest in the lot. Here's the shepherds keepin' watch over their flocks by night, that the wild beasts mayn't get hold on 'em. There's the little lambs a-snugglin' up to their mothers as nateral as babies. An' there's the angels up in the sky, with their white wings and goold rings round their heads, and them branches like rhubub-stalks in their hands—palms *they're* meant for. An' they're singin' jest as you may hear the singers up in the gallery at church, only a deal sweeter. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." Them was the first Christmas Waits. It 'ud be nice to hear music like that now in the cold mornings, wouldn't it? But now we'll have our supper, an' sing a verse, an' then we'll say good night, for it's time the little uns was in bed.'

A bun a-piece for the children was the supper, with a sip of elderberry wine, warmed in a vessel like a hollow horn (which the bricklayer's labourer, stirred up to abnormal activity and benevolence, borrowed from the public). And then we sang 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,' and the little party broke up; everybody wishing everybody else—our host especially—'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.' Custom has dimmed and chilled those cordial words; but the grateful heartiness of the young Folly folk made them leap out again into warm light.

VIII.

HOPPETY BOB AND HIS CLASS IN THE COUNTRY.



THE kind gen'leman I've told you on, said my friend Bob, 'ain't content with gettin' me into the hospital when I want it; he will make me go for a day into the country once a 'ear, an' he hires a wan sometimes, and finds the money for the grub, so that I may take my young uns with me. He was in only last Wednesday, askin' where we should like to go this 'ear. I'd put it to the little uns, on'y it's all the same to them, poor stived-up little souls, s'long as they can get a mouthful o' air that ain't downright gritty, an' have a tumble on some grass. Greenwich Park is nice an' near, an' we can get there without a wan. Cherry Gardens Pier is handy; and the river's a curious sight for childrep. It's queer, livin' so close to it, that they know so little o' ships an' that. The Folly ain't a sea-farin' part, but then it ain't a quarter o' an hour's walk to

parts that is. When it's fine of a evening, I sometimes hop down to the wharfs an' the yards. I like to see the water runnin' out an' in. It makes me think o' the quiet green country, an' the pure blue sea ; an' the very mud's nice to smell. There's a deal o' mud in the Colchester river, an' I think o' my poor mother. I think I told you, sir, as she was buried in St. Leonard's churchyard—that's on the Hythe Hill. But then, again, poor old father was smothered in it ; an' that's a sad thing to remember, though I do trust in Him that is all-merciful. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

'When I've took down the young uns to Greenwich—we went there two years runnin', and there ain't another place so nigh that's half so nice, to my fancy—the park, an' the 'eath, an' the college, as they calls it there, together—I've told 'em tales out o' the jography book, about the places I supposed the ships that was bein' towed up was comin' from ; and it was cur'ous to see how they suck it all in. Children is easy taught, if you can get 'em to listen to you. I wish I knew more to teach 'em ; often they fair floor me. "What's this ?" "What's that for, Mr Hoppety ?" "Why was it made so ?" they ax ; an' oftener than not, I can't tell 'em. They seem to fancy that I've been a sailor somehow, because I've told 'em how I was capsized, an' put ashore at Greenwich, when I was a little un. Hows'ever, when I don't know what a thing is, I tell 'em so, an' they mind all the more when I do tell 'em things. There ain't

much gained with children by shammin' to be wiser than you are. Law bless you, sir, they find you out by the look o' yer eyes. A man's eyes can't tell a lie, try the best he can. God's so fond o' truth, that He *will* make folks tell it somehow, I reckon.

'When we used to go to Greenwich, the collegé-men were about—there ain't many left now, I've heard. *Geese* the Greenwich folks used to call 'em—I s'pose because they waddled so ; but I liked to see 'em a rollin' ; it was like gettin' a sniff o' the sea. *Sparrer*, folks might call me, because I hop—though sparrers hasn't game legs, and a crutch, an' a hump on their backs, an' *they* has wings. But He as made me an' the sparrers looks after us both, the Testament says. Well, sir, some o' them college-men were nice old boys, an' it was improvin talk to listen to 'em, though they couldn't tell ye much about what they'd seen, except the names o' the ships they'd sailed in, an' the places they'd been at. But the sea seemed to ha' serioused them somehow. They'd a grave way o' talk—there they were a restin' after tossin' about, an' they talked accordin'. It was queer, after walking up Teapot Lane, wi' all them bold-eyed gals a-speakin' even to a man like me, to fall in with one o' those old fellers settin' thinkin' on the grass. The holiday-folk was racin' down One-Tree Hill, an' playin' kiss-in-the-ring on the grass, but there they sot a-thinkin'. They'd wanted God close by 'em when the stormy winds did blow, an' they looked as if they felt Him close to 'em in Greenwich Park. They wasn't *all* like that. Some

on 'em grumbled awful, an' behaved, I've heared, in a way as didn't become nobody—let alone old men like them. An' some—grey-haired old fellers, too—would tell a sight o' crams. One on 'em told my little uns that he'd seen a white bear a-top o' the North Pole, an' pitched him up a biscuit. But bless you, sir, that didn't take in the little uns. They didn't know nothing about the North Pole, but they saw by the look o' the man that he was a-lyin', an' so they axed me. I couldn't make 'em clearly understand what the North Pole was—p'raps because I hain't a very clear notion on it myself. Anyhow, I made 'em understand that it wasn't a bit o' timber that you could cut your name on, as the college-man made out; so they told him that he didn't know nothing about jography.

'I can't make up my mind where we shall go to this 'ear. I can go anywhere in reason—my kind friend don't mind how far—an' that's the difficulty, ye see. It's a troublesome thing to have what ye like to choose from. I think o' that sometimes when I'm inclined to grumble because I hain't got *much*. "At any rate," I says, "you know what you've got to do, an' that you must do it, Bob. Now, p'raps the rich folk that you're a-envyin' *don't* know what they'll do next, and the bother o' thinkin' about it keeps 'em from enjyin' what they're at." The first year* I took my young uns out we went out to our kind friend's. He lived out by Hornsey then. All thereabouts is very different now. Last Christmas I give myself a shillin' treat. It was nice an' bright in the

mornin', you may remember, sir, an' I put a bit o' bread an' cheese in my pocket, an' hopped over the bridge to the Bank, an' took the bus to the Archway Tavern and back—you change at the Nag's Head. Bless you, sir, I didn't know the place. There was rows o' houses in the Holloway Road where I remembered hedges; an' the garden at the Mother Redcap was cut up into streets, an' all the old trees was down; an' houses was backed right up agin the Highgate Cemetery wall; an' Hornsey, that used to look so green an' quiet, just as if it was miles away in the country, was all cut up with new roads, an' brick an' mortar, with that there great heavy Alexandra Palace a-lookin' down on it all, as if it was squeegein' out the breath o' the hill it's perched on. I must say, sir, I felt disapp'inted. Of course, when there's more folks, there must be more houses an' that, but I wish they didn't build 'em quite so thick where the grass used to be, an' builded 'em prettier. It's such a treat to folks that live in a place like this to get out to where there's grass, and trees, and hedges, an' daisies, an' buttercups, an' dandelions, an' such; an' where the houses don't look like London. There's a little bit of a white farmhouse, with a pond, and ducks, and haystacks, and such like, in Hornsey Lane, an' that looks a deal nicer to my mind than the grand new houses they've built there, with the builders' boards stuck up in front. It don't look as if it was built yesterday. Of course, it's very convenient for the City gen'lemen to have their willas so near London, an' most on 'em has had the

sense not to cut down the old trees, though the hedges is gone; but I think if I was a City gen'leman, I'd go right away into the real country, an' leave a bit o' green fields round London for them as hasn't got willas to walk in.

'There wasn't a Crouch End railway station neither, when I took the little uns there. Though *that's* not to be complained on; it's all the easier to get into the fresh air, for them that can afford the fare. And what with workmen's trains an' third class, railways is a benefit to poor people, though they do rout 'em out of their homes. Hows'ever, the country about Hornsey will stand a deal o' spilin'. There's trees, an' flat medders, an' up-an'-down medders, all out beyond, and you can walk through the medders, too. There's boards stuck up about trespassers, but that means if you break the hedges, an' trample down the grass just afore haytime, an' a man must be a fool to spile the prettiness o' what he goes to look at. I do love the country, sir, though it ain't often, as you may think, that I can get into it. I've read the poet Cowper, sir, and there's a bit in his "Task" that I could ha' wrote myself, if I'd on'y been a poet, an' knowed grammar. You laugh, sir,—an' well you may. It *do* make a consid'able difference if you *ain't* a poet, an' if you *don't* know grammar; but I can admire worses for all that, though these ain't rightly worses—there's no rhyme. It's in the "Winter Evening," if I remember right. Talkin' o' that, can you tell me, sir, why the second book is called "The Time-piece?" There's

nothin' about a clock in it, to the best o' my rec'lliction. But it's the lines about the country I mean I could ha' wrote, if I *could* ha' wrote 'em. The poet is a-speakin' about the love all sorts o' folk has for the country, an' he says,—

“ The willas with which London stands begirt,
Like a swarth Indian with his belt o' beads,
Proves it.”

That's just like the willas in Hornsey Lane—an' then he goes on about poor people keepin' flowers in boxes, an' teapots, an' such. Poor people does just the same now, only mostly they manage to get flower-pots.

‘ I'd a beautiful musk in that pot last 'ear—the pot seemed bilin' over with green an' goold—an' you can't think, sir, what a comfort it was to me. It was cheery to look at, just for the brightness of it; an' then it had a meanin' in it, too—like them blue and red textes they put up in the churches now-a-days, “ Consider the lilies of the field,” that's what my musk used to say; and it cheered up my bird there most as much as it did me. I used to let him 'out, an' he'd perch on the pot, an' rub his head into the leaves, just like a babby snugglin' up to the breast. I al'ays takes my Dick out with me when I goes into the country; an' when it's warm enough, I hangs his cage in a hedge as I'm a-restin', an' he pipes away over my head as jolly as them that has got their freedom. I buried up my musk when it faded, an' I expect I shall soon see a lot o' little uns peepin' up, just as our young ones grow up in the very place where the

old uns used to be. I hope I shall, for I've promised 'em all round, an' if the one I keep turns out well, I mean to exhibit at the Winder Garden Show this 'ear. Me an' my little uns is goin' to try which can beat each other at it. I can't give 'em books for prizes, an' so I give 'em little muskses, when I've got 'em. It does 'em good, I think, to have to take care on 'em, an' p'r'aps, in time, it may do their fathers an' mothers good—make 'em gentler, like. It seems to me as it ain't so easy to swear when there's flowers about. But then you'd think their children might keep 'em from that. Poor little dears! I wish their parents would look after 'em half-a-quarter as much as they look after their flowers.

'How them little dears do enjoy the fresh air! It makes 'em tipsy like. That first time I was tellin' you on, the little uns cheered pretty well all the way from the corner of the Liverpool Road (though the air ain't over fresh there), right up to the Old Crown, on Highgate Hill. 'That's where we got out o' the wan. I'd shown 'em Whittington's stone as we come up, an' I told 'em the story when we got out. That pleased 'em uncommon. I fancy the little chaps thought they'd only to slip out there some fine mornin', an' 'ear Bow bells, to get made Lord Mayors of. 'I told 'em they *would* be, if they *could* hear Bow bells; an', for my part, I can scarce believe that they ever *was* heard from there. To be sure, the walley between was a deal quieter in them times history tells on. Perhaps you may remember, sir, that there's a fine old red-brick house, with iron gates

and trees, that stands back just at the corner of Hornsey Lane. Well, sir, my little uns thought that that must be where the Queen lived. An' next to that, there's another old red-brick house—up the hill, I mean—with a coach-way you could drive a loaded waggon in at. I took the little uns up to see that, because that's where, Oliver Cromwell used to live. It's Cromwell House, as it's called. It ain't much that I know about him, an' so I couldn't tell 'em much, except that he was a great man, an' fought battles, an' had a wart on his nose. But when you're out a-travellin', you like to see all the sights, you know, sir; and they was pleased with what I told 'em—'specially about the wart. They thought it so queer that great folks should have warts; but we're all the same flesh and blood, ain't we, sir? an' has warts and weaknesses much of a muchness.

'It was cur'ous to see how the little uns stared up the hill. The houses was so clean an' so quiet, they thought the people couldn't be up yet; an' the ivy was hangin' over the old wall t' other side o' the way—it was a queer sight for us Folly folk. An' then we went along the lane, an' stopped to have a look down a-top o' Highgate Archway. That pleased the young uns, too. I was afeared they'd topple over, or squeeze themselves through the balusters. There was the road ever so far down so lonely, an' the birds was a-singin', an' the laylock was out in the gardens, and the sun was a-shinin' quite hot where we was, an' yet you could hardly see London for the smoke. It did look uncommon dreary. I couldn't

help pityin' them that was left in it, an' wishin' they could ha' been out enjoyin' themselves like us. It made me think somehow, sir, of the City of Destruction in the "Pilgrim's Progress," but then there was the church spires stickin' up here an' there, so *that* wasn't like; an' St. Paul's looked just like a big grey balloon up in the clouds, an' the sun was a-shinin' on the goold cross, though it was so black below. I like to look at that cross, sir, when I happen to be near by, though it do give me a crick in the neck to look up at it. There's a deal o' wickedness in London, but there's goodness too; an' there's the cross, up above all the dirt, a-watchin' over us.

'When we'd got out o' Crouch End we had a race, an' I should ha' beat, if my crutch hadn't tripped me up. I must ha' looked a comical sight, but it was pretty how the little uns kep' from laughin' till they see I wasn't hurt. When we got to Hornsey Church we sat down in the churchyard to have a rest, and the little uns picked daisies, an' most on 'em chattered away just like sparrers in the ivy in the old tower. But the littlest—her name was Jemima Webber, an' a sweet little gal she was, an' uncommon fond of me, pretty dear—sat as still as a little mouse. "What are you thinkin' on, Jemima?" says I. But she never said a word. Then I see she was settin' by a babby's grave, an' pattin' it just as if it *was* a babby. "They'll wake the child," says she presently, just like an old woman, "if they make so much noise." Pretty dear, little as she was, she'd had to lug

about a babby, an' the little thing had died, an' Jemima had a'most cried her eyes out when she see it buried. Poor little 'Mima ! She's buried herself now, an' I can't tell you, sir, how I used to miss her. She'd come in an' set with me by the hour together, when none of the others was there ; an' a lonely old lamester likes a sweet little thing like that to take to him.

' When we'd had our rest, we went across the fields to our kind friend's, an' the first thing he did was to give the little uns such a feed as must have astonished 'em ; an' the way they tucked into it must have astonished *him*. Eatin' an' drinkin' was goin' on, more or less, all day. The gen'leman, an' his good lady, an' the young ladies waited on us, just as if we'd been the Royal Family. Very kind people they *all* was, and *is*. There was plenty o' sport, though, of all kinds between whiles—trap-ball, an' rounders, an' kiss-in-the-ring, an' such like, an' the gen'lemen an' me rowed 'em about in a boat. He'd got a real nice place, with medders for the young uns to cut about in, an' cows for 'em to see milked, an' a great garden where he let 'em pick as many flowers as they liked to carry 'ome. An' what they couldn't eat he had packed up for 'em, an' he gave 'em a shillin' apiece besides. When the last eatin' an' drinkin' was over, he had us all in to his big drorin'-room, an' the little uns sang the Evening Hymn, an' one o' the young ladies played it on the pieanner, an' then we all knelt down—the little uns didn't seem to know what to make o' the fine cushions they put their little noses into—an' he said

a beautiful little prayer. An' then the wan came to take us home. Just didn't the little uns cheer as we druv off! They kep' it up, too, along the road as long as they could; but most on 'em was sound asleep afore we got back to the Folly. Pleasurin's tiringer work, I fancy, 'specially when you ain't used to it, than peggin' away at what you've got to do every day. It's a wearyin' kind o' world this, anyways. I feel thankful to think that I shall get a rest afore I go to heaven even. I fear as i. I shouldn't be braced up to stand its brightness else, if God in his goodness should ever let me see it. Leastways, I like to think as that's what the Psalms means when it says that He gives His beloved sleep.'

IX.

MALYON'S COTTAGE.



ON the eastern coast of England there is a melancholy jumble of low, lonely sand-hills. They are very lonely, very melancholy, for on one side of them is a wide barren heath, and on the other side the sea, which from that flat, cliffless shore never looks blue and blithe, but always sad or savage—green, yellow, grey, or awful black-and-white. When a steamer is sighted from those sand-hills, its trail of smoke is a mere film upon the horizon, and large sailing vessels pass in the far distance like flitting recollections of a half-forgotten dream. Only in times of storm are large craft seen close in upon that low, sombre strand, and then there are hopeless hearts on board ; for, though it has no rocks, it has an archipelago of shoals, and should these be avoided, as by a miracle, there is no harbour of refuge on that lee shore. Now and then a fishing-boat glides or canters by, inside the light-green or

turbidly tawny sand-banks, near enough for the hip-boots, and blue guernsey, and red comforter, and flapped sou'-wester of her steersman, astride across the tiller, to be made out from the land ; but that is very seldom, since there are few fish worth catching in those melancholy waters." On the opposite side of the island, the Cornish and Cambrian peninsulas swarm with marine life ; but on that barren eastern beach there are no velvet-knobby sea anemones, no gardens of fantastically-lovely sea-weed, no prickly 'sea-eggs,' no glittering 'caddis-worm nests ;' no shells to speak of, except a few razor-shells ; no blennies peering out from holes in rock pools, with wide-winged, sullen-jawed faces, like miniatures of sulky churchyard cherubim. Triangular pieces of wave-worn tile, little bits of coal, and gnawn, grey drift-wood ; a dry star, and a drying jelly-fish or two ; a few little long-legged crabs ; a few sand-hoppers leaping like ghosts of shrimps disappointed in their resurrection ; half-muddy sand, pimpled with moist worm casts, and littered with shrivelled, salt-candied, rusty-brown, bladdered fucus ; a scattered flock of grey and white sea-gulls skimming and circling, and harshly and hoarsely screaming over the 'sad sea waves,' and parading, and paddling, and pecking on the sad sea-shore—*that* is what is to be seen at the foot of those low, lonely sand-hills.

Sickly-green sedge sighs sadly on the sand-hills on the brightest summer-day ; their fans of fern have a prematurely-red, autumnal look in spring ; the blossoms of the stunted murze-bushes are born blighted-brown. Here

and there in the hollows mopes a rain-pool, or a scummy salt remnant of an overflowing spring-tide. There are mangy patches of coarse, spiry grass on the sides of some of the hills, and tiny rugs of moss spread almost square on some of the tops; but for the most part they are as barrenly bare as a bald head. The lack of life upon them is the thing that strikes one. Stray bees and butterflies boom and flit disconsolately over them. The omnipresent hum of insects, seen and unseen, is fitfully so faint there that the sighing sedge relieves the painfully listening ear. Even the rabbits, which are the most numerous inhabitants of the sand-hills, leave many a winding and cup or bowl-shaped hollow without a single foot-mark on their silvery sides. The sunbeams, the wind, and the rain, the spray, and hail, and sleet, and snow, are the only travellers, except the insects and the birds, that cross those smooth, symmetrical hollows. On a hushed summer afternoon they have an 'enchanted valley' look. The only trees in sight are three blasted ones on the rush-tussocked march-land, between the sand-hills and the heath, despairingly stretching their gaunt arms landwards as if arrested in a flight from doom.

I describe the place as I remember to have seen and felt it a good many years ago, but probably it is little altered now; being one of the spots that defy 'improvement,' and, with everything changing around them, preserve their lonely identity from generation to generation. When I knew those hills from eyesight, there was a

single cottage in one of their loneliest seaward hollows : a cottage roughly built of stone picked up on the sea-shore, and daubed with whitewash, which the sea-breeze had blotched. The only garden was the roof of coarse thatch, black with damp, and green with weeds. There was some story about the hovel having been very useful in the old smuggling days, but at the time of which I write its tenants were an elderly man and a young woman, of whom little was known ; but at any rate they were not smugglers. Although they had been for nearly a score of years tenants of 'Rabbit Hall' (as the hut was satirically called), they were still looked upon as strangers by the people of the little village on the other side of the heath. The man was known as Malyon, and that being an 'outlandish name' in those parts, the villagers distrusted it. He went neither to church nor to the public-house, and, therefore, they had small chance of getting into talk with him, and had no data on which to assign him a place in any of their few rough moral categories. The little talk they did get with him was another puzzle. He did not talk like 'the gentry,' he did not talk as they did ; and, although they were sharp enough to guess that 'working-folk' pronounced their words in the same way in the parts, wherever they might be, he came from, they felt that the man was not 'one of their sort'—did not think their thoughts or share their feelings. Herodias Malyon was no more popular than her father amongst the villagers. Although she had grown up from a baby into a young woman at

Rabbit Hall, she had no friend, no ordinary acquaintance in the village. There was a half-petulant, half-proud look in her handsome face—as if she was discontented with her lot, but would not condescend to grumble about it—which the villagers resented as a liberty. What right had such as she, they reasoned, to give herself airs when, seemingly, she had never been used to anything better than what she had got? Her name too was against both her and her father. A good many of the villagers could not read, and those who could did not often read their Bibles ; but they went to church, and what they heard of Herodias there was not likely to prepossess them in favour of a man who did not come to church and had given his child that name, or of the daughter who bore it, and did not come to church either, but was generally as unsociable and unaccountable as himself.

I remember well the first time I saw Herodias Malyon. She was standing on a mound, near the hut, looking out to sea, over the hoary and rusty skeleton of an old wreck upon the beach. It was a bright day, and a fishing-smack was cantering over the gilt, green waves ; her sails, and motion, and the sunbeams brightening them up as much as those sad waters can be brightened ; but, just as she came in a line with the old wreck, a sloping, slate-coloured squall that had been chasing her caught the smack ; she heeled over, and had to battle hard for life in the dark blotch upon the sunny sky and sea. The squall swept on, leaving a furrow-like track of upthrown water ; and the smack righted, and slanted out towards

the offing ; but, whilst the struggle lasted, I had seen a look upon the girl's moody face which struck me. It was not one of woman's natural pity for possibly drowning men. She did not seem to think at all of the smack's crew, but to have been using the bounding boat and the battered wreck as symbols in some moralising dream, in which her own fate was mixed up. To poets, I suppose, outside things are all parables, to which they can give all kinds of interpretations ; but amongst peasants, and peers too, and the ruck of people of all kinds, this power of parabolization, with any intensity, is so rare, that I could not help feeling curious about the girl who had written out a part of her heart's history in clearly traceable and yet undecipherable characters on her mobile face as she moodily looked at the wreck, eagerly looked at the smack in the sunskine, and fearfully looked at the smack in the storm.

The inquiries I made about the tenants of Rabbit Hall gave me the information I have already given. I heard also that the father and daughter got a living, 'such as it was,' by making nets and seamen's hosiery, &c., for an outfitter in a town about ten miles off, who sent over three or four times a year for what they had finished. Malyon seemed to have been a fine man once, the villagers said, but to have been crippled by some accident. I saw him several times afterwards, when I was wandering over the sand-hills : a dark, well-featured, intelligent, but morose-expressed man, with something of a seafaring look ; well built, but paralysed on one

side. He had to use a stick to help him in plodding through the sand. Neither he nor his daughter at first would do more than crustily return my 'good day' when I tried to get into conversation with them; and the coast-guard men, whom I now and then met in my rambles by the sea, told me that the pair were just as reticent with them. 'The father's an old bear,' said one blue-jacket, 'and the daughter's a young 'un, though she hain't the same excuse. A strapping, good-looking wench she is; ain't she, sir?' A fortnight afterwards I fell in with the same man, and began to ask him again about the Rabbit Hall people. 'I haven't seen the old man out this ever so long,' he answered. 'Mostly when I've come along here of an evening, I've seen him sitting down there by the water, when it was anything like fine weather, and often when it wasn't. And sour enough he looked—he ain't a sort to enjoy the evening air, as you call it, sir. But I haven't seen him outside his place now for a week or more. No, I don't think he's bad—not worse than he always is. If he was a neighbourly kind o' man, I'd look in; but what's the good of going to have your nose snapped off? I've tried it, sir. They're a queer lot—both of 'em. I expect they'll go as I have heard they come—it was long before my time—nobody knows where.'

When the coast-guard man strolled on I ventured down to the hut. The door was open, and I could see, as I drew near, Herodias at work upon her nets. The occasional click on the needle against the mash was

almost the only sound in the cottage. Malyon, who could no longer manage to work even with his unparalysed hand, lay on a low bed, sullenly watching his child. Neither took any notice of me until I darkened their doorway, and then each seemed to resent my intrusion. 'Father will soon be up again,' said Herodias, in reply to my inquiries. 'No, there's no need for a doctor, or I should have gone for one.' And then both kept silence in an obstinate way that soon made me beat an uncomfortable retreat. I called, however, next day, and several next days, but the man was still in bed. After a time my visits were endured, and at last I could see that, in a sluggish kind of way, the recluses welcomed me. I grew at home in Rabbit Hall, and told Herodias that a doctor *ought* to see her father. A doctor came, and said he could do nothing for the man—he was gradually breaking up—all that he needed was nursing. Hadn't he better go into the Union House? But neither he nor his daughter would hear of that. Herodias nursed her father, and their trifling craft managed somehow to keep both in spite of the man's illness. It was soon plain that he would never be out on the sand-hills again until he was carried across them to the churchyard; and as this conviction grew upon the solitary pair, they softened strangely, both mutually, and to the few who came in contact with them. Malyon told me, brokenly, a good deal of his life, and thoughts and feelings. I heard something of them from Herodias, and a little more from the tradesman who bought their

wares, when he drove into the village one day and found that Malyon was dead and buried. Piecing and interpreting what I heard and saw, I may rede the riddle of the hovel in the sand-hills thus :—

Henry Malyon was a west countryman, sprung from a line of Cornish fishermen that ran back to the first catching of pilchards on the Cornish coasts. His parents were strict Methodists, and from fifteen until past thirty he had been a hearty, happy Methodist also. At the former age he had been 'converted,' become a 'member of society,' and gone out in his father's boat, feeling quite sure that he was safe so far as the next world was concerned, whatever winds might howl or waves might boil in this. Before he was twenty-five he was a 'class-leader,' and held 'prayer meetings' in his own boat, both when she was anchored off her native shores and when she lay, during the herring season, in Dublin Bay, with a little fleet of other 'heretics' around, sending Wesley's Hymns over the moonlit catholic waters. Malyon prospered in mind, body, and estate. He was shrewd, he was hale and handsome, he was putting money by, and he gratefully thanked God for all his blessings. But to the sound doctrine of his sect, which has almost become the Church of Cornwall, through its earnest preaching of justification by faith, Malyon gave a private interpretation that made it spiritual poison to him. Although he denounced the 'doctrine of works,' he secretly credited his 'faith' (making it a work) with his prosperity. He looked upon himself as one who had obtained heavenly

favour through wisely exceptional obedience to heavenly will. He was kind to comrades in distress, but he could not help showing them that he thought they had brought their trouble on themselves by witless wickedness. 'He that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat.' 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished, but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered,' were pet texts of Malyon's. In all his neighbours' sorrows he was apt to discover proofs of Divine wrath, but when any loss happened to *him*—'a professing Christian and the son of professing Christians'—he glossed it over with 'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' and, so long as the losses were too trifling to be chastening, he preserved his self-complacent eudæmonic creed intact, and continued a faith-Pharisee.

But a time came when Malyon had to say, 'He hath set darkness in my paths, he hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head; he hath destroyed me on every side;' and, when tested thus, he found that his 'hope' also was 'removed like a tree.'

With his usual prudence, he had avoided early wedlock; but when he was about thirty he had married a very good-looking girl, the daughter of a well-to-do small farmer. She was a 'member of society,' a 'teacher in the Sunday-school,' the beauty and the heiress of the little sea-side chapel—a bride who fitted exactly into Malyon's theory of both lives. He invested her little dower in the pur-

chase of another boat; and for the first two years—except that they had no children—nothing could be smoother than their married life. Malyon went on prospering, and was promoted to all the offices in connection with the chapel that he could hold together. But things were very different when a baby was expected. Malyon's father-in-law had crippled himself in his business through the amount of money he had given to his daughter; and when he applied to Malyon for help, the dowry was sunk in the sea. Other losses followed by sea and land; bickerings ensued between the father and son-in-law; both men had fallen from their high estate in the chapel circle—their little 'world : ' and, finally, Malyon became insolvent, and had to give up his chapel offices; as cruel a mortification to him as the resignation of the Great Seal is to an ex-incumbent of the Woolsack. He could no longer find comfort in the chapel services. At home he found small comfort, since his wife peevishly reproached him with being the cause of their own and her father's downfall. However, his health and strength were still left him, and his confidence in himself, as a righteous man who had a right to be prosperous, had been shaken only—not shattered. A month or two before his wife's confinement, when he had made such requisite arrangements at home as were within his power, he tramped to Falmouth, and shipped before the mast in a West Indian trader; doggedly resolved to give Wisdom another chance of being justified by her child, with rehabilitated fortunes.

'I have foregathered with too few Cornishmen to be able to reproduce accurately their mode of talk. I wish I could ; for the way in which Malyon worded his story, and pronounced his words, added somehow to the pathos of his tale when he told me how he limped into his native village eighteen months after he had left it. He had come back with all the pride beaten out of him, but he had still a little hope left in his heart. His vessel had carried away her foreyard just before she reached Jamaica, and a fragment had almost crushed the life out of poor Malyon. He had lain in hospital in sweltering Kingston, and been discharged with one side nearly helpless from paralysis. He had been indebted to charity for his return voyage, and to countrymen's more warmly charitable kindness for the lifts homewards he had got on land ; but when he got home, he had been hoping, he would find one still to love him, and teach a little one to love him. When he did get 'home,' he learnt that there was a little girl in the workhouse, said to be his, and that his wife had gone away with a 'flash London gentleman, that had been down poking about the rocks.'

Then Malyon cursed God, and morally died. Everything that had happened lately was so utterly contrary to his old creed that the creed vanished like a jelly-fish shrivelled into scum and driven out to sea before the wind. Habit still told upon him, however. He had not been used to drink, and so he did not spend the very little money he had about him on the purchase of a few hours' forgetfulness of his despair. He had been

used to provide for those connected with him, and so he went to the workhouse and claimed the child, although in a hazy way he had begun to doubt whether she could be *his* child. The world is not half so heartless as it is often made out to be. Plenty of pity was expressed and felt, and practically manifested for Malyon in his native place, by Laodicean 'church-folk' as well as ardent Wesleyans—who, however (scandalized though they were at what had happened, in all ways, to the whilom pillar of their church), were willing to give, as Methodists generally do give, according to their means, most liberally. But Malyon could not stay in St. W——. In a half-stunned way, scarcely going through the most perfunctory form of returning thanks, he accepted a small portion of the money proffered him, and a lift out of St. W—— in an old chum's cart, with the baby-girl upon his unwithered knee. They had told him at the workhouse that she had been christened Mary after her mother; but he had given a bitter, hollow laugh, and said, '*I shall call her Herodias—after her mother;*' and the girl had been brought up to believe that Herodias was her proper name; and when she came to learn who Herodias was, the name had given her strange thoughts about her parents and the world at large.

To get as far away from St. W—— as possible, into some corner in which he could eat his heart in solitude, was the only purpose that directed Malyon's wanderings. He did not wish to kill or starve either himself or the child, and yet he wished that both were dead. He had

lost faith in God—the world seemed to him no longer under government, but a scrambling place in which the best thing that such as he could do would be to creep into a hole until death gave him a more comfortable asylum—if, indeed, death would give him that. ‘But, perhaps, there will only be another ununderstandable hubbub then, instead of an end of it all,’ often thought poor Malyon; and so he could not cool his fevered spirit even with the prospect of the chill grave. However miserable poor men may be, they must still work—unless they are willing to try at once that remedy for their misery. In passing through the town I have spoken of, Malyon noticed a Cornish name over the door of a shop, in which nets, amongst many other things, were sold. Feeble cripple as he was, at any rate, with a little management, he could still net. The shopkeeper was not Cornish-born, but his father had come from Malyon’s hundred, and so the son took an interest in Malyon and the child. The good man was well-to-do, owning fishing boats, as well as outfitting them, and in one way or another was able to put constant work into Malyon’s hands. The pay was not much; but it was enough for such a hermit. At first Malyon rented a room in the town; but constant contact with fellow-creatures galled the morbid-minded man; and hearing somehow of the hut on the lonely sand-hills, ten miles north of the town, he removed thither, getting his new home for an almost nominal rent; and in consideration of his Cornish blood, his em-

ployer humoured his eccentricity, sent him out his materials, and brought back his work.

Rabbit Hall was the only home that Herodias could remember. There she had been taught to net and knit and use the sail-maker's 'palm.' She had been taught to read and write also, and though the Bible had become a tasteless book to her grim tutor, from force of habit he had bought her one, and used languidly to hear her spell the promises that were burnt-out fireworks to him. Whilst she was a child, he had kept her so closely from talk with anybody but himself that, when she ceased to be a child, and his increasing weakness compelled him to make her the purchaser of the few things they needed at the village shop, Herodias shrunk from what Wordsworth calls 'the dreary intercourse of daily life' with as sour shyness as her father's. Nature made father and daughter love each other after a fashion; but theirs must have been a dismal home: the man thinking of the days in which he had said that his 'tabernacle would never be removed,' and then thinking how all his past—not merely the accidents, but the very pith of it—had vanished like a dream; the girl, with a young heart craving after happiness, wondering at the way in which her heart was starved, distrusting the father she did love and the mother she wanted to love, puzzled by all she read and felt, dreaming wild dreams as she looked out on the sad sea, with the sedge sighing sadly at her feet. Herodias only was with her father when he died. 'It's all dark! Jesus, save me! I used to believe in Him,

and it's all I can think about ! ' God keep you, girl, and pardon me for not taking better care of you ! ' ' That's what poor father said,' Herodias told me, shaking with tearless sobs.

Malyon is buried in the little grey-walled churchyard, on the landward side of the heath. Herodias saw him buried, and then went back to the lonelier-than-ever little hut. What became of her—where she wandered to—I cannot say. When she was not seen outside the cottage for two days running, a passing coast-guard man looked in, and found it deserted ; and, so long as I remember it, it never had another tenant.

X.

A MISSIONARY IN THE EAST.



IT is of no Henry Martyn that I have to write. Such men do noble work, but even in this world, fortunately, they receive some reward. When their hearts sink and sicken at the smallness, after all, of the fruits of their labours, and they realize that they stand alone in the populous solitude of myriads of dusky faces, scowling, sneering, at the best utterly unsympathizing—cut off from home and home's associations, and prevented by centuries of alien thought and tradition from getting *en rapport* with the strange people they have come out to teach—their very isolation has something captivating in it. But London, as well as the map of the world, has its East—an orient peopled by thousands of benighted and suffering folk whom it is by no means an interesting work to enlighten and relieve. There is no picturesqueness in their dwellings or their rags. Their wickedness is of the vulgar kind, that finds

its record in police reports. They talk no musical foreign tongue, or pretty broken English ; but sigh, and lie, and curse in coarsest Cockneyese. They have no old-world creed which it is an intellectual treat for a Christian controversialist to have to confute: the 'beak,' when he orders them something out of the poor-box, is their Ormuzd ; the 'slop,' under all circumstances, is their Ahriman. This was the East in which my missionary laboured—an unlettered, hard-working man, who sleeps in a nameless grave, but who went about doing good whilst he lived, without ever thinking that he was doing anything to make a fuss about. The class to which he belonged is not proverbial, I believe, for either energy or any other kind of morality : but good comes out of all kinds of Nazareths, far oftener than is generally supposed.

I met him first in the Commercial Road. As I was passing a public-house there, three half-drunken women reeled out, and one of them was saying, with a hard laugh, 'Ah, I remember when I'd go without, to get my old man a dinner. But I'm wiser now ; I look after myself.' No doubt the husband had done his worst to kill his wife's love, but it was sad, nevertheless, to see the once pretty, and still young creature thus scornfully kicking, so to speak, its corpse. Such were my sentimental musings, but the woman had been overheard by a more practical thinker. 'Are ye wiser, missis?' said a carman, who was standing at the head of his horses in an adjoining archway. A drooping left eyelid gave the man's face a roguish expression of chronic wink, but

something in its tone told me that he was not merely 'chaffing' the woman, and I stopped to listen to the dialogue which ensued. On the woman's part it began with a 'Shut up, you ——,' &c.; but the carman was not to be silenced. 'No, I'm not a Methody, my gal,' he answered, with a laugh; 'but I think it's a pity you should spoil that pretty face of yours with jacksy, and foul your lips wi' sich talk as that.' He did not 'preach' a bit, but chatted on like a kind big brother. I have heard sermons even from wearers of silk aprons not half 'so adapted to the occasion' as the kindly words of the carman in his leathern one. The woman listened, after a time, all the more readily because he said it was such a pity such a '*pretty* gal should go to the bad.' Perhaps this was not sound logic, but it was good rhetoric; and, somehow, it *does* seem a special pity when a lovely woman stoops to folly. A beautiful face can gladden, like the sun, by merely looking out upon the earth: and when the owner disfigures it by sin, she robs all she meets of pleasure they might have had. 'Well, if I'd you for my master, I think we should get on,' said the woman, as she turned to go away; 'you seem a good sort of a bloke.' The carman gave a jolly laugh as he answered:--

'Thankee, I'm provided for at present, and I don't want to get rid of my old woman jist yet. I've got a daughter, besides, a'most as old as you.' And then, in a more serious tone, he added, 'But think of what I've been sayin' to you, will yer? and you and your master,

p'raps, may come round. You may be 'appy yet, as the song says. Anyhow, you know it isn't *right* to git lushy. Think of yer kids. And there's somebody else, you know, we've got to think on.'

His mate came up the yard, and jumped on to the tail of the van. The carman clambered to his perch and gathered up his reins. As he cracked his whip, and steered his unicorn-team into the stone tramway of the Commercial Road, I did not wonder at the appreciative glances which his late catechumen had cast upon him. He was a stalwart, manly, not bad-looking fellow, with curly black hair, beard, and moustache, and mildly merry brown eyes, one of which, as has been said, was made specially roguish by the drooping eyelid. He was evidently a 'respectable' man in his own humble line. Of his extra-professional respectability I had got a hint, and I soon learnt more of it.

He was 'kenspeckle,' as the Scotch say; and I readily recognized him when, a fortnight afterwards, I chanced to attend a meeting of an East-end board of guardians. He had not come to plead his own cause, but that of a neighbour—a fireworks-maker, with five children, whose wife, when she was well enough, did mangling. The father was out of work, and the wife was ill in bed; the rates, even for the East-end, were awfully high, and the guardians were anxious to make as many of their poor as possible cease to bother them, by telling them they must either come into 'the house' or starve. The Poor-Law question is a very complicated one. It is not

fair to heap indiscriminate abuse on guardians because they protect the interests of those who have elected them—it is not only their own money they have to look after. On the other hand, the feeling that makes the poor loathe the shelter of the workhouse, considering the loss of caste which such shelter now implies, is an honourable one—however unreasonable it may seem in individual instances. There are faults on both sides. It was not, however, to the noisy minority of the poor, who bring a bad name on their nobly-suffering fellows by refusing to work, and then snapping at the hands which gave them eleemosynary bread, that the fireworks-maker and his wife belonged. They had pawned or sold almost everything they had, except the mangle, to buy food for their children and themselves; but even for their children's sake they could not bring themselves 'to come upon the parish.' Such pride is false, I think, but it exists very widely; and the fact is a terrible satire on the often-asserted 'humanity' of our parochial provision for the poor. When fathers and mothers would rather die, and let their children die, in a cold, dark hole, like frost-killed flies, than accept aid to which they have a legal claim, there must surely be something wrong in the administration of the law which gives them that claim. Their neighbours had done what they could for the poor creatures, but most of them were only a little less poor than themselves. My missionary was their wealthiest friend, but he had a pretty large family himself, and it may be supposed that his wages—a pound a week—did not

afford a wide margin for pensions to his numerous *clientèle* of beneficiaries. Finding that the man would not come before the board himself, my missionary had given up his dinner-time to inform the guardians of the family's deplorable condition. The chief speakers among them were two men of about fifty, whom I will call Mr. Snapandhold and Mr. Barkandback. The former had scanty, moist, iron-grey hair brushed down in streaks on a low forehead, shaggy eyebrows, fierce grey eyes, and a viciously down-drawn mouth. When he spoke he clenched his left fist, as if about to let fly at the person he addressed. When he had once formed a judgment of character or a decision as to a line of conduct, he stuck to it through thick and thin. Mr. Barkandback was a sandy-haired, doughy-faced gentleman, with a weak, peevishly-pursed mouth. He was as spiteful as his colleague, but his spite was of a flabbier fibre. He was afraid of being 'shown up in the papers;' whereas Mr Snapandhold utterly pooh-poohed the press. 'What did scribbling chaps know about parish business? The chances were they hadn't paid their rates,' he scornfully remarked.

'Ain't you ashamed of yourself?' he said to my missionary; 'a great hulking fellow coming begging.'

'I haven't come on my own account, sir,' answered the missionary, very mildly, though the blood mounted to his face; but he was cut short with,—

'Don't tell me. You see, it won't do, though. Well, what story are you going to trump up now?'

When it had been told, Mr. Snapandhold instantly

exclaimed, 'A lazy, worthless fellow, I'll be bound. He likes loafing about, and drinking with you and such like. I suppose the money has run low, and so you want the parish to stand treat. He could get work if he liked. Why, they've fireworks at Cremorne and the Crystal Palace, and there's no end of money thrown away on such trash every fifth of November.'

'That only comes once a-year, sir, like the hoysters,' respectfully retorted the missionary, with a very unmerry twitch of his drooped eye-lid, which, nevertheless, made it seem to give a saucy wink.

'Don't be insolent, feller!'

'I'm sure I didn't mean to be so, sir. But he has walked himself barefoot lookin' after work.'

'Well, then, that only proves that he's a fool at his own fool's business. Why doesn't he try the docks?'

'So he has, sir; but a weak man like him's no chance in the crowd they've got about the gates. We've had a heast wind height days runnin', sir.'

'Don't tell me. Any man that really wants to work can get it.'

(A favourite doctrine with a good many far more estimable people than Mr Snapandhold: I only hope that—save so far as they might be taught to be more forbearing in future—they may never discover its falsity in their own cases.)

Here Mr Barkandback put in his oar:

'But you say, man, the woman's got a mangle. If she can't work it, why don't she sell it?'

‘But what is she to do when “she gits well agin?”

‘Well, there *is* something in that, Mr Snapandhold. those papers would make what they call a point of that!’

‘Stuff and nonsense!’ was Mr Snapandhold’s polite reply. ‘These people, if there *are* any such people, must come into the house—the whole boiling of them—if they want relief. And now (to my missionary) you can go about your business—if you have got any business to go about.’

‘I’m sorry for ‘em, gen’l’men,’ was his reply, as he pulled his forelock. ‘I’ll try to make ‘em come in, for their young uns’ sake; but it *is* a ‘ard thing when two as ‘ud work their fingers hoff ‘ave to come to that.’

The Board broke up after a long sitting, during which those whom I could not help thinking the least worthy applicants—slavishly whining creatures—had received the most favour from Mr Snapandhold. All the guardians had left, except himself and Mr Barkandback, who were sitting in a little side office, talking over accounts. I was standing in the lobby buttoning up my overcoat, when in came my missionary once more. ‘‘As the gen’l’men gone?’ he said to the porter. ‘There’s two of them there,’ answered the porter, pointing to the side office, the door of which stood half open, ‘but you can’t go in, man.’ In, however, the missionary stalked, and, nervously clutching the back of a chair, said, in a low, trembling tone, ‘You must send somebody, gen’l’men—will you go yourselves? I’ve fetched ‘em a doctor, but the poor woman is dyin’.’ There was a ring of un-

mistakable truth in his voice which staggered even the incredulity of Mr Snapandhold, and made him long, more than ever, most probably, to be able to floor the tall truth-teller with his clenched left fist ; whilst Mr Barkandback started back in his chair, aghast at the prospect of a damaging inquest.

The poor woman *did* die ; there *was* an inquest which provoked comments that took the sweetness out of the sugar of Mr. Barkandback's nightcap of brandy-and-water, and made Mr Snapandhold snort more fiercely than ever at the ignorant presumption of ' them scribbling chaps.' The poor neighbours took the poor children, until the poor father, who went into the stoneyard (saying, ' What's the good of holdin' out, when poor Sal's gone? '), got back to his old business of making latent sparks, instead of chipping them out of granite. A charwoman took one, a vendor of cats'-meat took another, three sister seamstresses took a third ; my missionary took two.

Whilst they were still with him, I had the honour of getting on visiting terms at his house. I had learnt his address at his place of business, a sugar refinery in Great Alie Street—a tall, melancholy pile of dirty drab brick, breathing forth a sickly scent, as of brimstone and treacle. The room I entered in the little lane, at the top of a dwarf flight of stairs, all askew—the *salle à manger* of the family, and the bedroom of the parents (the daughters sleeping, and generally working, in the other room)—was neat and clean, and decently though scantily furnished. In a bed on the floor, counterpaned with the

carman's drab, brass-buttoned great coat, lay the two adopted little ones, staring, with dilated round dots of eyes, at the intruding stranger. All the family were assembled there, except the father, who had gone out, after he had had his supper, on one of his missions. Mother and daughters were all busy at work, stitching away in the dim candlelight, that made uncanny shadows flicker out and pop in again beneath the chest of drawers. They were shy at first, but when they became aware of my respect for the missionary, they grew eloquent in his praise—the wife, especially, although, nevertheless, she seemed to grudge the fag he gave himself, and the time he spent away from home, when his bread-winning work was done. I had to go away before he came back that night, but I stayed long enough to see that he was not one of those whose charity begins *outside* their home. Then, and at other times, when I happened to call whilst he was out, I heard of many instances of my missionary's goodness. Instead of repeating hearsay stories, however, I will mention one or two cases of which I chanced to see something myself.

I was having a chat with him in the dull twilight of a dark winter afternoon (he had been laid up at home for a few days with a bad foot, on which a heavy weight had fallen, but was just beginning to limp about again), when in rushed a homely woman of thirty, the eldest of the three needlewomen who had taken one of the fireworks maker's children. She was in great trouble about her youngest sister. 'Oh, John,' she said, 'what are we to

do? We've had no luck, I think, since the little gal left us. I can't get a mite o' work, and there's poor Nan in the hospital, and now Keziah's goin' to the bad. She's *that* headstrong no one can't hold her, if it ain't you, John. The young un seemed to keep her a bit steady, but now she says what's the good o' slavin' and starvin', when she could git money for the askin'? And so she've spruced herself up, and gone to walk about the 'Change, to ketch hold of a City gent. I couldn't stop her. That gal that lives under us put her up to it.' The poor woman was evidently in great distress, but I could not help wondering at the hard, cynical tone in which she spoke—before a stranger, too—of her sister's meditated *faux pas*. A street-walker's life, of course, was somehow wrong, and, perhaps, a bad speculation in the long run; but still, her tone seemed to imply it was natural enough, when a girl had got a pretty face and no work, that she should sell her beauty for bread and clothes.

'Well, sit ye down by the fire, and I'll call in the missis, and then I'll see what I can do for you.'

And presently he buttoned himself up, got a stick, and hobbled into the City. I learnt afterwards that he did find the girl behind the Bank, just beginning to talk with a well-dressed man old enough to be her grandfather. My missionary laid hands on her, and I have no doubt that her companion got *his* character told him pretty plainly.

Another time I met my missionary in Whitechapel, leading an imbecile young man by the hand, just as if he

had been a child. The idiot was capering with delight at the sight of the long lines of straw carts, whose high-piled, overhanging yellow loads seemed to flood the dingy thoroughfare with country sunlight, and my missionary was looking as pleased as himself at his pleasure. This 'poor Joe' was the son of a woman who did any kind of odd work that would enable her to keep her boy with her. When the boy's father pretended to marry her, he had a wife already. He soon deserted her, and she had been left to fend for herself and her son, illegitimate through no fault of hers, who was not only unable to do anything for himself, but subject to fits when painfully excited. The mother had been forced to go into the London Hospital with rheumatic fever, and poor Joe had been taken into the workhouse until she should come out. But a woman who had seen him there, and afterwards visited his mother in hospital, had terrified her by telling her that Joe was having fits 'as fast as he could fall,' and was sure to die and 'be buried in only his shirt,' if some one did not take him out. The poor creature had sent an imploring message to my missionary, and that morning he had rescued Joe from the workhouse, and was taking him to his own home, where he kept him until the mother was able again to take charge of him.

Space will allow me to give only another specimen of my missionary's work. In that dreary Bromley-and-Bow-Common district, where factory-stalks bristle like blighted bean-haulms, the air is foul with an ineffable

medley of mineral and organic mal-odours, the bricks are furred as thick with filth as if they had once arched sewers, and the only bright thing is the sulphur heaped in the yards of the chemical works, there lived a lonely old woman, who had not a friend in the world but my missionary. She lived in a boarded-up railway arch, which had once been used as a stable. The graceless youth of the neighbourhood greatly persecuted the poor bent old creature, and there was not a soul there who cared whether she lived or died. The missionary's visits were a great comfort to her, both as a protection and a proof that in the wide world there was still one person left that would remember the old woman, who had outlived all the rest of her friends, when she was put into the ground. The missionary every now and then also took her a loaf, an ounce of tea, a smoked haddock, and such like ; and, since she liked to hear a chapter in the Bible read, as 'mindin' of her o' the days when she could afford to go to church,' he always took his Bible with him when he called upon her, and a candle to read it by. He made furrows between the lines, with his slowly-moving nail ; he boggled terribly over the proper names ; but those readings, in that damp, rotten old place, with the candle stuck into a blacking-bottle on the corn-bin, were more touching than any poetry professor's prælections.

And now I have only to tell of my missionary's end. It chanced that I had not seen him for more than two months, when one evening I again tapped at his door.

A strange woman opened it. '*Mr. Brown?*' she repeated dubiously after me. 'Oh, you mean John the Carman. Law, bless ye, sir, haven't ye heard? He's been dead this six weeks—him, and his missis, and one o' the gals. They took the fever from one of his sick folk as he was settin' up with. Ah, *he was* a good man, was John; and the rest o' the gals, poor things, 'as sold their traps and gone off to New Zealand.'

I made out that father, mother, and daughter had been buried in one grave in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery. It must be within sight of the railway arch where he used to read the Bible; but the boarding is pulled down now, and the old woman is at rest as well as John.

XI.

THE HORSESHOE MEADOW.



OME years ago, being an invalid at the time, I was ordered into the country. I took lodgings in a farmhouse about a hundred miles from town, got up when the farm-people got up, went to bed when they went to bed, and spent almost my whole day in wandering about the meadows, fields, and woods on foot, or stumbling along the leafy lanes on the back of a superannuated, fat, blind, hoary old cob, known as Stumpy. The farmer, who liked a joke, said that Stumpy and I were the only idle good-for-nothings on the farm, and so we had better keep one another company. There was nothing striking in the scenery of that part of the country. Hill-worshippers would have called it tame. It was not absolutely flat, however, and it was rich in wood and water, grass and wild flowers. For me, therefore, it had 'infinite variety.' A slow, winding little river—one of

our many Avons—was the boundary of the farm on three sides. The farm was a peninsula, and the point farthest from the farm-house and high-road, the Horseshoe Meadow, was an island. The Avon went round it like a bow, and a ditch, bristling with bulrushes, was the plank-bridge-spanned bowstring.

This Horseshoe Meadow was my favourite lounge. I generally took a book or a fishing-rod with me, but they were mere excuses for sitting still. The book was scarcely ever opened, and the float was hardly ever looked at. I went down to the Horseshoe Meadow to enjoy upon its sunny grass the *dolce far niente* of an after-dinner cigar, and also to drink in the quiet variety of the scene. On the other side of the river stretched a gentleman's park. A belt of oaks, elms, beeches, and plane-trees spread their branches over the dark-green water. Fallow-deer in twos and threes came down to the river-brink, and peeped at me shyly through its fringe of osiers; noiselessly scampering away when I raised myself on my elbow, and then turning round on the first knoll to glance at me again with haughty timidity, aristocratic curiosity. Rooks flew cawing over the Park trees to and from the rookery in the elms round the ivy-clad little church, hidden away on the other side of the Park. The gorgeous kingfisher zig-zagged past me, and more than once in a fish-bone-littered hole I found its eggs of rosy pearl. Gauze-winged dragon-flies—green, brownish yellow, and steelly blue—darted hither and thither, playing havoc on

humbler flies, like clipper corsairs let loose on a fleet of unconvoyed merchantmen. Now and then a fish leapt at a fly, and fell back into the water with a silvery splash; others, more sleepy—thick-headed green chub, and big-bearded brown barbel—sulked in weeds and under sunken trees. Water-rats flopped into the river, and dived under it, or swam across it, to take a hermit's meal of reed-salad, looking as melancholy as old bachelors who have never married because they have been crossed in love. Water-lilies, white and yellow, floated on the river, and there were great jungles of forget-me-nots along its banks. The 'water-boatman' rowed himself on his back with his second pair of legs now this way and now that, as if he had been disappointed of one fare, and were rushing off to secure another. Lanky little insects, whose name I do not know, ran along the water, and then, getting scared, suddenly turned themselves into little floating bits of hay. 'Whirligigs' whizzed in a wild dance upon the sluggish stream without ever cannoning against one another. The fork-tailed water-scorpion, spiked as to the head very much like a Prussian soldier, lifted its brown wing-cases, and buzzed about, sunning its red body. In, and on, and over the river, quiet as it seemed, there was a constant stir of life. In the ditch there was more of this quietly ubiquitous life. Green-coated newts, with buff waistcoats and crimson shirt-frills sticking out through the middle seam of their coat-backs, swam hither and thither, sculling and steering themselves with

their oar-blade-like tails. Tapir-snouted little water-shrews pushed one another into the water, jumped in after one another, played at hide-and-seek amongst the bulrushes and the pebbles on the bank, and trotted along at the bottom of the ditch, thickly spangled with glass-bead-like air-bubbles. Close by the ditch I found a round harvest-mouse's nest, crammed with the most comical little plump, soft, warm mousekins. On the willows round the Horseshoe Meadow I found attar-of-roses-scented green-and-purple musk-beetles. I was always finding something fresh and interesting there, as, indeed, any one can find almost anywhere, if he will only keep his eyes, and mind, and heart open.

But one discovery I made in the Horseshoe Meadow—that which has led me to head this chapter with its name—was very unlike the findings I have referred or alluded to. It was not fresh. It was only a repetition of the old, old story of man's selfish vice and woman's weakness—after all, selfishly vicious too; and therefore only in a very painful sense was it interesting.

My farmer used to pay his men on Saturday afternoons, bringing home the necessary cash from the county town the day before, which was his market-day. And on Saturday afternoons the men were allowed to enter the house by the front door, the queer little three-cornered room in which Farmer Mack paid his men opening into the queer little lobby in which the heavy front door slowly swung, and Mrs Mack, not liking to have, as she phrased it, 'a troop of mucky-footed chaps traipsing

through the house on cleaning-up day.' Both the big door and the little lobby were curiosities of architecture. The door was iron-plated inside, and moved on its hinges as ponderously as the portal of a merchant's safe-room. It was so big, and the lobby was so small, that only one person at a time could sidle in. When the farm-labourers were clustered in and about the pay-room, the farm fields—always very sparsely populated—were left almost entirely to the insects, the hedge birds, the vermin, and the game. On Saturday afternoon I set out for a lonely walk to the Horseshoe Meadow.

The hasp of the gate of the Horseshoe Meadow clinked and clattered against the staple in the gate-post as the gate swung to for the third time. When I had opened it, a wish to have a ride upon it child-fashion had seized me, and I had been swinging to and fro upon it, as I dare say a good many middle-aged people have swung upon gates (when they thought there was nobody by to see them), recalling with a pensive pleasure the old times when such backwards-and-forwards motion—especially if forbidden—could give them a thrill of delight they can never get out of anything now. But when the hasp clinked and clattered against the staple, and the gate jarred against the gate-post, from which, being out of practice, I had failed in repelling it with my extended left foot, I jumped down in alarm, and put on a preternaturally grave face, in order that if any one chanced to be near, I might not be suspected of having just been making a baby of myself. After all, however, I thought

it was most unlikely that any 'one could be near; and therefore I was greatly astonished when I saw pretty Dolly Mack, the farmer's eldest daughter, coming up from the river, with an affectation of leisureliness, but looking very agitated and also very cross. To see her there at all was a puzzle, since she was not in the habit of taking leisurely country walks, and there were no cows or calves or poultry in the Horseshoe Meadow to claim her care; but why pretty, pleasant Dolly, who had generally a smile and a kind word for everybody, should look flustered and angry with me was a still greater mystery. It was not explained when she told me as we met (Dolly still looking very cross) that she had been hunting for the guinea-fowls everywhere, but could not find them. Dolly did not generally get 'into a state' about things like that, and when I told her that I had seen the three guinea-fowl hens in the orchard, close by the house, and heard the cock in the farm-yard crying out 'cocked-hat, cocked-hat, come-back, come-back,' when I started for my afternoon stroll, Dolly looked crosser than ever. She made out that it was because she had had her hunt for nothing, but I could not help disbelieving that excuse. She went off in a hurry and a huff, and I lay down on the river-bank, wondering regretfully how I could have offended pretty, kind-hearted Dolly, who had hitherto always had a cheering look for me, and had never wearied in preparing and serving with her own hands all kinds of country dainties for her father's invalid lodger, maugre his uninteresting old-fogeyishness. A Manilla

No. 2 brought on a relapse into convalescent's selfish complacency, and, quite forgetting Dolly, I lay dreamily watching the silvery little dace rising at flies like miniature trout. Presently, however, I saw a great dragon-fly chasing a pretty little blue butterfly, and directly afterwards I saw the stern of a punt half hidden in the rushes on the Park side of the river. The two sights, in a mysterious 'somehow,' seemed to fit into one another, and equally mysteriously I was thinking the next moment of pretty, cross Dolly again. But this flash of puzzling light could be submitted, so to speak, to spectrum-analysis. I had never seen a punt in that part of the river before—Dolly had met some one from the Park—my clinking, clattering, jarring gate had sent the some one from the Park back to the Park in a hurry, and Dolly back in a bad temper homewards. Who could the some one from the Park be? Then I remembered that I had seen a London swell staring into Farmer Mack's pew from the Squire's pew the Sunday before—a scented, eye-glassed, diamond-studded, faultlessly gloved, clad, booted, figured, moustached, and featured swell, according to what, I thought, would be a country girl's fancy. In the swell's well-cut but also rather too well-fed features there had been an effeminately fatuous look of indisputable superiority to the world at large that (I am half ashamed to say) had made me (though I was at church) feel half inclined to kick him, half inclined to take him up by the nape of the neck, and turn him round for the no longer admiring gaze of his feminine ex-worshippers.

His host, the plainly-clad, hale, ruddy, bluff, yet in all essentials thoroughly courteous old Squire, was such a manly contrast to his guest, that I had felt disgusted that the women's eyes in the congregation—the eyes of country-women who knew well what a fine old boy the Squire was—should have been diverted from their usual worshipful glances at the old Squire into caressing admiration of the essenced London swell. But when he had been recalled to my memory, I remembered that there ~~was~~ something worse than fatuous conceit in the scented swell's stare into Farmer Mack's pew, and I became anxious about pretty Dolly.

We did not meet again until we met next morning in the farmer's pew. Dolly, who previously had been kindly eager to do anything she could for my comfort, had avoided me ever since our uncomfortable meeting in the Horseshoe Meadow. She came late into the pew, flushed with hurry and excitement, and dressed, I fancied, more smartly than she had been the Sunday before. She carefully avoided my eye, but the London swell, whose name I had ascertained to be the Hon. Algernon Dumaresq, screwed his eye-glass into his right cheek, and regarded me, whenever I looked his way, with a stare of mesmerically stony superciliousness. When I was turning away my eyes from him, he let his glass fall with lackadaisical ease; as soon as I turned my eyes on him again, he put it up once more with languid elegance, and gazed at me with the same kind of curiosity—if a gaze so blankly impassive can be called curious—he would have mani-

fested if he had been looking at a mortar-line rather whiter than the rest in a dead wall. A man, of course, does not like to be looked at in that impertinently stolid way; unless he be a very meek Christian indeed, his toes tingle to give the stolid starrer pungently fundamental proof that the stolidly-stared-at is a biped individuality. After all, however, it did not matter much how the Hon. Algernon looked at me. What I was anxious to discover was whether—and, if so, how—he and Dolly looked at one another. In spite of her rustic shyness and his London *aplomb*, they did, when they thought I was not looking, exchange conscious glances, and the mutual consciousness expressed in those glances made me more anxious than ever about poor, pretty, vain, tender-hearted little Dolly.

I was puzzled now to act. Suspicions that may seem cogent proof to the suspecter may be considered—often rightly—mere proofs of his fussy uncharitableness when communicated to those who have a high opinion of the suspected person. I did try to hint my fears to Mr and Mrs Mack, but I only roused a storm of objurgation against myself. They were both as proud as fond of their pretty Dolly. If it had not been for my character of invalid, I think the farmer would have knocked me down. Mrs Mack rated me soundly, accusing me of pakey spite, 'because Mr Dumaresq is so handsome, and *he's* a real gentleman. He's the old Squire's own sister's son, and he'll have the estate, and us and ours have lived on the land for three hundred year and more—

'taint like your London nobody-knows-who or where-you-come-from here.'

We patched up a peace, but I found that I had done more harm than good by my interference. Poor little Dolly angrily kept herself out of my way, and instead of keeping a stricter watch over her, her parents let her go in and out just as she liked, to prove to me how indignantly convinced they were of the innocence which I had maliciously aspersed. During the rest of my stay at Longstock Farm I *saw* nothing to increase my suspicions as to the Hon. Algernon, but that very fact somehow made me the more suspicious. I had intended to stay over harvest at the farm, but my relations with the farmer and his family had become so chilly after what they called 'the to-do about nothing' that I had made, that I was glad to get away a week or two before the first sickle was put into the corn. Dolly would not come out of the dairy to bid me good-bye. Mrs Mack shook hands with me at parting in a very different way from that in which she had shaken hands when we first met; and Dolly's brothers and sisters—once my merry young friends—took their mother's cue, and did their best, so far as sulkily jubilant looks went, to make me feel that they considered my departure 'a good riddance of bad rubbish.' Farmer Mack drove me to the railway-station in the county town, but he scarcely spoke a word upon the road. When the porters had taken my luggage out of the chaise-cart, I asked him whether he would not come into the refreshment-room and have something to eat and

drink before he started back homewards. 'No, sir,' he answered coldly. 'If I want anything, I can get it at the Blue Boar. I've given you the best I had to eat and drink, and you've paid me regular, and you've got the receipts, and there's an end of it. I used to think that you was a sort that I should like to have down as a friend like, but that's not my present wishes. The farther apart we two keep, the better pleased I shall be. You've tried to put bad thoughts into my head about my Dolly, and you've made the poor lass that did what she could for you as mis'erable as you could make her.—No, sir, I'd rather not shake hands, if it's all the same to you. I'm a father: you ain't—leastways you haven't got a wife and little uns you ain't ashamed to own. If you had, p'raps you wouldn't be so ready to think wickedness of innocent young folk that never did you any harm.' So, having spoken, the farmer jerked his left rein, and whipped his horse out of the station-yard.

A month or two more than a year afterwards I was walking up the City Road, after midnight, in a dense fog. I was walking, because the 'buses had ceased to run, and the sleepy Hansom-drivers, with whom I had tried to bargain to take me to the suburban house where I was staying, had asked such preposterous fares for my conveyance, on the pleas of the fog, and because 'it's such a jolly long way, you know, sir,' that I thought it more sensible to use the long legs with which Heaven has been pleased to endow me. A few roysterers from Highbury Barn, howling dismal 'comic' choruses out of

the very little tune they would have had if sung according to the score; here and there a big black-great-coated policeman, with fog-drops on his whiskers, leisurely tramping out his 'shift,' or standing stolidly statuesque at a street-corner; and a ragged tramp, who had failed to obtain a night's lodging in a refuge or a casual ward, were almost the only men—except cabmen and watermen clustered about still gas-lit public-houses—whom I passed. I saw more women than men—some of them mere girls: the shabby, haggard dregs of prostitution. In twos and threes, utterly unsexed in leering glances and loathsome words and gestures; or drifting about solitarily like ghosts in the clammy fog; I passed those poor creatures, who ought to have been father-fondled daughters; wives and mothers, with husbands and children to think them the best women on earth. But they had come down to this—that they were the scornfully rejected 'leavings' of man's vile lust even in the miscellaneously traversed City Road.

Just beyond the canal-bridge, where the fog, thick as it had been before, thickened—a bit of a mast-vane, apparently stuck into the dense atmosphere, like a handleless knife-blade into pease-pudding, and here and there a dim slanting streak of vaguely beginning, vaguely ending rope, seemingly supported only by the fog-bank on which it leaned, were the only signs of the barges that I could make out—I saw a phantasmal figure of some kind blotching, and yet almost blending with, the

fog, under the blot of bilious light formed by the gas-lamp by which the figure stood. When I was almost close to it, I found that it was a young woman, lounging against the cold lamp-post, beaded with greasy dew. She said nothing to me when I came up to her, but she lifted her eyes to mine. Of course, if otherwise it had not been plain, they would have told me what had brought and kept her out in the raw wintry small hours ; but there was not the brazenly shameless look in her eyes that I had seen in so many eyes that night—this poor creature was new to her horrid trade, I thought. The next moment I recognized her, and exclaimed, ‘Dolly Mack! Is that you? How came you here?’ When she found that she was recognized, she attempted to rush away, but I succeeded at last in persuading her to let me speak reasonably to her for a few minutes. And at last I persuaded her also to let me take her to the house of a worthy old woman, not far from the ‘Angel’ (in more senses than one), who, I knew, would think it no trouble to get up, and give the poor girl a warm meal and a warm bed, and would somehow manage to keep Dolly in her house until I could relieve her of her responsibility in the sunlit morning—and do it all, too, without a grain of the pharisaic, or fulsomely-gushing ‘goodyishness,’ both of which anger and disgust the fallen. At the man or woman who shrinks from contact with them, they hiss out in their hearts, ‘The haughty old hypocrite, if we only knew what you’ve often been up to, you wouldn’t be able to give yourself such airs.’

And the gushing Christians who are so fond of telling their fallen brethren and sisters—with a high degree of self-complacency—that, if it had not been for the grace of God, *they* would have been as bad as anybody, do not find much greater favour amongst sinners in distress. ‘If it’s no merit of your own, you needn’t be so cocky about it,’ the sinners think of these too demonstratively condescending saints. ‘*You’d* somebody to help you, and *we hadn’t*—that’s what it comes to; so you’ve no right to turn up your noses at us on the sly, shamming all the while that ‘you’re so mighty charitable.’ I knew, too, that my Pentonville old woman would cleverly manage to keep poor Dolly until I could call for her without assuming any of those gaoler-airs which likewise make the impecunious fallen rebel. ‘Rich folks can be as wicked as they like—so long as they don’t steal, or murder, or such as that,’ they think, ‘and nobody dares to offer to lock *them* up. Why should *we* be deprived of our liberty, if we haven’t broken the law any more than *they* have? We ain’t worse than they—we ain’t so bad according to the chances we’ve had—and anyhow we’ve as much right to go where we like till we *do* break the law.’

When I went to see Dolly next morning, or rather somewhat later in the morning in which I had found her in the City Road, she was sitting with her Pentonville hostess over a snug little fire, partaking, or pretending to partake, of a snug little breakfast. She and her hostess were evidently already *en rapport*. My idea was to

get Dolly to stay with the good old woman until I could write to Mr and Mrs Mack, and get one or other or both of them to come up to London to the rescue of their poor, stray, bemuddled lamb. At the first mention of her parents' name, however, Dolly fired up fiercely, and the old woman nodded at me sagaciously across the fireplace, to intimate that it was 'too soon for that.' When I offered by-and-by to take Dolly to a Penitentiary not far off, of whose admirable management I knew something, Dolly made no objection; but when our cab stopped in front of the Penitentiary, Dolly—country-born as she was, London-roamer as she had become—turned half restive at the sight of the jealously-locked gate and the Persian-shuttered windows. A cheerful-looking housemaid unlocked the gates, locking them again as soon as we were inside. Dolly once more held back, but being reassured by my telling her that if she were foolish enough to wish to leave the Penitentiary before its managers thought it would be well for her to leave, they would have and would claim no power to detain her, she followed the servant along the covered passage, at the end of which the pleasant-looking matron of the establishment stood waiting for us. She took Dolly in charge without any 'Stand by, for I am holier than thou' drawing in of her skirts, and led her into a little room looking out upon a garden. The garden was so long and broad, and the late autumn sunlight fell so freely on it, that I could easily see that Dolly's dread of being locked up in a cell had greatly diminished. Then

the matron led me into a room in which four members of the committee were sitting, waiting to inquire into the cases of applicants for admission. I explained poor Dolly's case to them, and they consented under any circumstances to receive Dolly until I should have had time to hear from her parents ; but, being a good deal more experienced in such matters than myself, they were not nearly so sanguine as I was in hoping that Mr and Mrs Mack would at once rush up to the rescue of their child. They therefore said that it would be better to treat her case as an ordinary one, and have her in to ascertain her fitness for admission as a regular inmate. In reply to shrewd questions—searching, but very kindly put—she told her, to me touching, but, as I supposed, very common-place story. I was astonished, therefore, to find that the ladies of the committee, who, I had thought, must have had hundreds of such cases to deal with, were as much moved by it as I was. ‘There is very little of the romantic to be met with here,’ said one of them to me in explanation. ‘Now, that poor child's case is the kind you read about in novels, and people fancy that almost all the cases we have to do with are like that. But it is a great mistake. Love has not had much to do with the fall of ninety-nine out of a hundred of the poor creatures who come here ; and, though it seems a terrible thing for a woman to say, I cannot help believing that women have more to answer for than men in leading girls astray.’

I need only give a bare outline of poor Dolly's ac-

count of herself. Dumaresq had not been forced to trouble himself about any novel stratagems. The pretty, vain, fond little country girl had fallen in love with the handsome London gentleman. Proudly pleased when she found that she had attracted his notice, she willingly kept the appointments he made for their meeting clandestinely. When he told her the old stale lie that he would marry her as soon as 'family considerations' would permit him, the fond little fool believed the languidly drawling villain. She was seduced, and the Hon. Algernon vanished. When her parents discovered what had happened, they reproached her so fiercely that she fled from home in desperation—her only aim being to hide from every one she knew in that vast, too often unsheltering refuge for the wretched of all kinds—London. On her dismal tramp up she was confined in a workhouse; and there the baby died. As soon as the doctor would allow her, Dolly left the workhouse, and set out once more on her weary walk to London. She had reached it—wet, weak, hungry, footsore, and battered—about a fortnight before I found her in the City Road. She was sitting on a door-step at the corner between the East Road and the New North Road when an old woman came, and looked at her, spoke to her, and pretended to pity her. The old woman had not much difficulty in persuading her to accompany her to her house in a low side-street in Hoxton. There she nursed her up for a few days, and then giving her some smart clothes in the place of her travel-stained and tattered

garments, the old woman one evening bade her dress and come out for a walk with her. They had not gone far before Dolly discovered the vile purpose for which the old harridan had brought her out for a ramble by gaslight. She obstinately refused to consent to the horrid plan, and would have run away had not the old woman terrified her by threatening to give her into custody for stealing the clothes she had on. The old woman was unwilling to lose the chance of fiendishly filthy gain she thought she had got in Dolly. For a few days longer she kept her, alternately coaxing and ill-treating her. She brought in hardened fallen girls who talked about the jollity of a 'gay life,' and scoffed at Dolly's scruples—especially since, as they made out, she was no better than they were. She had told something of her history to the old woman, and, of course, the hag utilized it for her infamous purposes. But Dolly still held out, and, losing patience, the old woman had turned her out of the house, half starved and in her original tatters, of course, about one o'clock in the morning of the Monday before the early Wednesday morning on which I fell in with her. Dolly wandered about in the dark, dismal streets until the dim Monday's sun came up; she wandered about all day until the gas was lighted, until the shutters were put up, until all gas-lights, except the street-lamps, and here and there a half-turned-down gas-blink in an invalid's bedroom, were put out. Although she had been confined in a workhouse, that was the only workhouse of whose regulations she knew anything;

and she knew even less of Refuges for the Destitute than she knew of casual wards; and neither, indeed, would have been open to her at the time when the longing for some place of shelter came upon her so strongly that she thought she must go mad if she did not find one. Utterly fagged out, however, she dropped down and fell asleep in Canonbury Square, so far as I could make out from her description of an old tower with ivy on it, which she had seen when roused from her slumber against the 'rails of some green place' by a stern policeman and a pair of grinning news-boys. She got up, and tramped out the whole of the dreary Tuesday. The fog was so thick that she wandered, about almost unnoticed. The church clocks tolled out midnight—a drearily long hour, and then they tolled out their solemn Ones, and once more there was silence—almost unbroken silence. Nearly four million people—a nation's population—were clustered around her, but not one of them had any care for her.

The rest of her account I had better give in her own words.

'I was so miserable, I thought I'd drown myself; and I'd hardly thought it before I was on a bridge, just as if the devil had heard me. But then I turned scared. I was afraid to jump. I couldn't see the water for the fog, but I could just hear it, and it seemed dismaller than the streets. And then I thought about poor father and mother, and that I should never see my poor baby again if I killed myself like that, and I didn't want *him*,

though he has behaved so bad, to have the sin of my killing myself on him. And then the devil tempted me another way—it was just as if I'd heard him speak the words—"There's nobody cares for you," he said; "father, nor mother, nor nobody. Why don't you care a bit for yourself? You could make a living in London if you liked." And then I went and stood under the lamp-post, and this gentleman, that had known me at home, came up.'

And *then* poor Dolly broke down in a paroxysm of hysteric sobs.

I wrote to Farmer Mack—again and again I wrote to him—about his daughter, but he paid no attention to my letters. Meantime, I was glad to find Dolly settled down in the Penitentiary. In spite of the kindness of the management, the peace she enjoyed there must have been often a troubled, and at other times a mournfully pensive peace; but still her wounded heart had been soothed by 'the balm of Gilead,' as well as the emollients of the kind looks and words and deeds of naturally tender-hearted, pure women. Pretty Dolly, with plainly-smoothed hair, in the institution's uniform of plain gown, apron, and trilled nightcap, had somehow an incongruous look, when I remembered the smart way in which she was curled and dressed on the Sunday on which I had detected the interchange of glances between her and the dastardly dandy who had betrayed her; but Dolly no longer had faith in fine clothes, and so the contrast did not trouble her. She was a handy, good-hearted girl;

and soon became not merely the dearest getter-up of the finest and most complicately frilled and laced linen sent into the Penitentiary's laundry, but also a first favourite with the matron, her fellow-inmates, and every one connected with the establishment. A comfortable situation was obtained for her, and at the end of her first year of service she made her appearance at the Penitentiary to claim the little pecuniary reward which the institution grants to such of its *protégées* as remain a year in one place. Dolly returned her sovereign, supplementing it with a liberal percentage of her wages, as a donation to the funds of the asylum in which she had been saved from destruction of both body and soul.

That was the last I had heard of Dolly, when one May morning I received a letter from the clergyman of the parish in which Longstock Farm is situated; written, at the farmer's request, to state that Mr Mack was very ill, and was most anxious to see Dolly once more before he died. Would I bring or send her home, if I knew where to find her? I soon found her out, and obtained permission for her to leave for home next day. Thinking that it might, perhaps, be well that she should not go home alone, I accompanied her. We started by an early train, and duly reached a little roadside station, about a mile from Longstock, on a branch line that had come into existence since I was last in that part of the country. One man was the full factotum strength of the little station's staff. A wood rustled on each side of the line; white clover grew almost up to the rails. When the train had

disappeared, it was almost impossible for a cockney to realize that he had come by train to such a rurally quiet little place. We passed through a sleepy, grey, tottering, little hamlet; only a few old men and women, almost as grey and tottering as their houses, seemed to be left in it—they were basking sleepily in the glorious sunshine of the brilliant May forenoon, or spreading their yellow, vein-corded, shaking hands in drowsy enjoyment over their grey wood fires, which the bright sunbeams had almost put out. We passed a tiny old church, with a warped wooden steeple, arabesqued with green and grey, silver and orange, and scarlet lichens; a rusty vane pointing due north, although the balmiest of west winds was blowing; tumble-down hoary tombstones, and green-powdered, cracked, and rotten grave-boards; and sheeny lush grass that hid almost half of the church's mullioned, green-paned, low side-windows. In the grey pound we saw an old grey donkey, luxuriously asleep with a half-eaten tuft of grass and thistles in his mouth. Profound peace seemed to brood in the atmosphere—startlingly profound and beautiful to those who three or four hours before had been in bustling, dingy London—but we were going to a death-bed, and not far off were the quiet places in which Dolly's life had been so nearly hopelessly blighted. When we had passed the pound, our nearest way to the farm was a short cut through the Park. Poor Dolly looked agitated when the little white footgate lazily swung to behind us. We came out of the shadow of the Park trees within sight of the Horseshoe Meadow.

Intrinsically it was as sleepily pretty a meadow as ever it had been ; but its associations had spoilt its beauty. Neither Dolly nor I could help glancing at it, and then glancing with uncomfortable consciousness at each other. Neither of us, however, said a word about it. We crossed the sun-gilt little Avon by a grey, glistening wooden bridge two fields lower down. Dolly was back on the old farm once more. The larks sang as gloriously as they had sung when she listened to them 'in maiden meditation fancy-free.' The ranks of stooping weeders went up and down the furrows, joking and wrangling, and somnolently scolded by their overseer, just as they had done then. Perhaps I am putting my own thoughts into Dolly's mind, but I could not help fancying that she thought it almost cruelly strange that the old home should be so unchanged when she had gone through so much since she had left it. The farmhouse, however, somehow looked altered, although not a single brick-and-mortar renovation could I detect in it. Its garden was aglow with purple double-stocks, whose luscious perfume reached us before we saw them ; but still gloom seemed to brood over the brilliantly sunlit old grange. Mrs Mack had seen us coming, and came out into the garden to meet us. 'Oh, Dolly,' she could not help saying, 'if it hadn't been for you, poor father would never have been like this !' but then she broke down, and Dolly broke down, and they were kissing, and crying, and sobbing in each other's arms. We sidled one by one past the iron-plated front door as of yore, and Mrs Mack at once took

Dolly up into her father's bedroom. As soon as she had left her there, she came down to me, to see that I was eating and drinking the substantial foods and drinks which she had ordered into the 'best parlour' as soon as she caught sight of me, under the impression that any one who had come to her house 'all the way from London' must be just on the point of dying of inanition. She had wanted Dolly to eat and drink before she went up to her father, but because Dolly was country born and bred, and poor Mack was so anxious to see her at once, she had allowed her daughter to go up—the circumstances being exceptional—without refreshment.

'Ah, sir,' said poor Mrs Mack when she had come down, and was filling my plate with deftly-carved slices of round of beef, on which, as she carved, her tears fell fast, 'this is a sad business. We used to think that you was hard, but if we'd minded what you said, all this mightn't ha' happened. Father's never been the man he was since poor Dolly went away. He's left me comfortable, so as I can carry on the farm, with a looker, till my poor Tom comes o' age. But I didn't marry my old man just for him to die and leave me his money. Poor Dolly ! she's a deal to answer for, fond of her as poor father was. And yet we was hard, too, I'm afraid, and anyhow we didn't behave as we ought to you, that did the best you could to help us ; and God bless you, sir, for what you've done for that poor 'child of mine. I'd got a notion to the very last that she'd look a brazen hussy, but she ain't a bit like that. She looks a deal

respectabler than some of them about here that turns up their noses at her, and p'raps has done worse, and with lower fellows than my poor Dolly ever had to do with—though he was a villun, and that nobody can't deny. You see, sir, we didn't know the rights of it at first. Dolly wouldn't say a word. She only run away, poor child. But it soon came out—leastways so far as people's talk went, and the Squire and father had a row. The Squire wouldn't have a word said against his nevy, and if it hadn't been for the lease, I do believe he'd have turned us out. And then poor father got cantankerous with everybody about everything. *We* hain't led a happy life, no more than poor Dolly. He's a real gentleman, though, whatever his nevy was—and God's been pleased to keep *him* out of the estate—is the old Squire. I'm afraid that Mr Dumaresq was a very bad sort, though he was a gentleman, and an uncommon good-looking gentleman. Anyhow he's dead, and when he was dying he owned to all about Dolly to the Squire. He'd kept it in before, because he knew that the old Squire wouldn't stand any of his goings on with the old tenantry. The estate will go out of the family now, but I ain't sorry that Mr Dumaresq hasn't got it. Well, sir the old Squire comes to my old man, and he says, says the Squire, "You was right and I was wrong, Mack. It *was* my nevy that ruined that pretty girl of yours. He's my sister's son, but I can't say a word for him. What can I do for poor Dolly, Mack?" My old man fires up. "You can't do nothing, Squire," says he. "Your nevy

was a villain ; I'll say it, though he is dead, and thank God I do that he'll never come into the place." And so they parted, and my poor old man went on his cantankerous ways, and I don't believe they ever spoke again till the day the parson wrote the letter to you for us, sir. Pogr father had been getting so bad that the parson, knowing how long we'd lived on the land, thought he'd like to see the Squire. So he brought him, and the Squire was uncommon kind, and they made it up, and we hunted out your letters, sir, and so you was written to, thank God ; for I do believe now Dolly'll be a comfort to me, poor girl, though she has been such a cross.'

Just then we heard the anxious tapping of a foot on the floor of the room overhead, in which the dying man was lying. Mrs Mack rushed up-stairs, and I followed her.

Farmer Mack was sitting up, pillow-propped, in his bed, with his left arm round weeping Dolly. With his right arm he was making feebly inviting waves. 'Give me a kiss,' he gasped, as his wife ran towards him,—'and don't be hard on poor little Dolly. She's a sinner, I'm a sinner, we're all of us sinners, but then there's—why ain't the parson here? He could tell ye. Pay them well as looked after my poor girl—in that London—the villun ! Lord have mercy on me——'

And with that abrupt prayer on his lips—the one that springs to the lips of all persons, however diverse may be their circumstances or culture, when they feel the icy clutch of death round their hearts—Farmer Mack fell back upon his pillows and died.

XII.

PONT DERFEL'S NEW MISTRESS.



IT is very common, but it is very unfair, to entertain a prejudice against a woman simply because she is a stepmother—we should wait to find out what kind of stepmother she is before we pronounce judgment. ‘Il y a belle-mère et belle-mère.’ A good many stepmothers, no doubt, fully exemplify the ordinary notion of novercal cruelty and neglect, but there are a few who are kinder to their stepchildren than their own mothers ever were, and a respectable minority, at any rate, who are quite as kind to their predecessors’ offspring as they are to their own. One or two stepmothers, indeed, I have known who, in their anxiety to make no distinction between their stepchildren and their own children, did—so far as looks, and words, and deeds went—make a distinction to the disadvantage of their own children. There are some stepmothers who have a good deal more to dread from

their stepchildren than their stepchildren have to dread from them. When a widower has sons growing into manhood, and daughters who have grown into women, and marries again, against their wishes, the stepmother's domesticity, I should think, must be very much like living in a wasp's nest—at any rate, at first. I have known several instances in which naturally sweet-tempered stepmothers, prepared to sympathise, if I may venture on a bull, with their stepchildren in their antipathy to themselves, because feeling timidly conscious that they had done the children at least a 'sentimental wrong' in stepping, against their wishes, into their dead mothers' places, have had the sweet wine of their dispositions turned into sourest vinegar by the persistent and persecuting hostility of their stepchildren, and so have become eventually the 'horrid monsters' they were unfairly expected to be from the first. But I also know a case or two in which a sweet-tempered woman has triumphed over such hostility, and found, if not exactly affectionate children, the most devotedly fond and almost idolising friends in her whilom persecutors. Of one of these cases, in which the stepmother had very heavy odds against her, I am about to tell.

Down in that beautiful, grimy, lushly-verdant, fire-scorched, ever-bustling, solitarily-silent western land, where Wales and England march, and the scenery is so similar, and Saxon and Celtic names so overlap, that it is hard for a stranger to make sure when he is in the kingdom and when in the principality, I had an

acquaintance whom I will call Mr Owen Prhys. Business relations had originally brought, and continued to bring us into contact, but they had become friendly enough to make Prhys at least profess to be angry if I did not make his house my hotel whenever I happened to be in his part of the country. I did not need much pressing, however, to induce me to become his guest, since the inns in his neighbourhood were not the most comfortable of caravanserais, and he had an exceedingly comfortable house, standing in what auctioneers call 'park-like grounds'—*i.e.*, a good-sized timbered paddock, which formed a refreshing oasis in the jumble of coal, iron, ironstone, limestone, and mineral refuse which lay littered north, south, east, and west, outside. The little lodge and the gate-piers were both somewhat begrimed; there were smears of smut on the outside of the house, too, and on each side of the front door stood a little obelisk of coal, like a negro sentinel; but in the paddock there was scarcely anything to remind one that he was in the heart of a mineral district, except now and then a cloud of smoke. In spite of the smoke, the trees were stout and leafy, and the grass and ferns had the luxuriance, and the emerald-like, liquidly-gleaming greenness, which seem peculiar, in Great Britain, to the West. My friend was not a millionaire coal-and-iron magnate. He was only one of the managers of the Iron Works, that roared and sighed for ever, like the sea, within a quarter of a mile of his pretty paddock; but his salary was handsome enough to enable him to keep up

a very cosy establishment; he had lively, intelligent, agreeable children also; and, therefore, my preference of Pont Derfel, as his place was called, to the solitary discomfort of the Coffee Room, the bustling discomfort of the Commercial Room, of third-rate inns, whose pickled walnuts were unmasticable wooden balls, floating in what looked like the heeltaps of a mixture of rotten sawdust and mouldy ink, will not be wondered at.

One sunny day in September, leaving my portmanteau at the railway-station to be sent after me, I walked up to Pont Derfel, and, entering by a little side-gate, struck across the paddock. Presently I saw my friend Phrys, with his back towards me, walking away to the house, and his whole family clustered under a beech-tree that now and then shed a slowly-falling brown leaf, or rattled down a little shower of mast. Something unpleasant had happened, I could tell from their faces. I had full opportunity to scan their looks, since they were so preoccupied with this unpleasantness, whatever it might be, that they did not notice me until I spoke to them. Owen, the eldest son, who was about to be articled to an engineer, was lying on the grass, with his head resting on one hand, and propping with the other Parkinson's 'Mechanics.' He pretended to be studying it very intently, but the sulky scowl on his brow was evidently not caused by the hardness of the problem on which his eyes were nailed. Little Jessie stood by her favourite brother, with her pinafore half full of the beech-mast she no longer cared to gather, looking over his shoulder

at his diagrams as intently as he kept his eyes fixed upon the page, and with the same kind of interest. Poor little Jessie's twitching mouth showed that she was ready to cry. Leaning against the trunk sat Guinevere, a pretty, graceful girl of 'sweet seventeen.' She had thrown her book from her, and was looking down with a very sad and yet obstinately rebellious expression, whilst her shaggy terrier, mounting guard over the book, was wagging his tail, and looking up in wonder at the face that had no smile for him. Margaret, the eldest of the family, who had kept her father's house since her mother's death, five years ago, when she too was only seventeen, was reading a letter which she evidently did not like. And beside her, the younger boy—'lark'-loving, book-hating Tom—loll'd on his back, with his head on his hands, looking the best-tempered of the bunch, but still, for him, most remarkably grave.

'Why, what is the matter with you all?' I asked, when we had interchanged how-d'ye-do's, and the young people still continued grumpy.

'We have heard some unpleasant news—a family affair,' answered Margaret. Of course, I could make no further inquiry; but Tom blurted out—

'Why, sir, the governor's going to marry—a girl that would do for Owen there, when they're both grown up; and the governor wants us to say that we are glad, but we ain't, and we shan't. And the governor wants us to promise to be very fond of his new wife, and to call her mamma, but we won't. I won't, anyhow. A fellow

can only have one mother. And the girl's mother has written to say that she hopes Maggie will go and see her, and Maggie don't want to go; and, if she has a grain of spirit she *won't* go—will she, Owen?’

‘Hold your tongue, Tom,’ Owen growled back. ‘Boys’ talk will do no good.’

I did not stay long at Pont Derfel on that occasion—father and children, who previously had been so fond of one another, were so painfully sundered in feeling that I was glad to get away from the place. When I learnt from my friend that he had proposed to, and been accepted by, a very beautiful, almost penniless lady, only two years older than his eldest child, I certainly did not think that either he or she had done a wise thing.

The wedding took place about six months afterwards. I called at Pont Derfel about a week after the bride had entered on her reign there—such an unassuming reign, and such obstinately rebellious flingers-off of the easy yoke!—and I went over to the bride's side. She *was* very beautiful, and accomplished, and all that—and ‘all that’ goes a long way, often an unfairly long way, in a man's judgment of a woman. But she was something much better than ‘all that.’ She was a quietly sensible little body (though she *had* married a man who might have been her father), and tenderly, self-denyingly good.

During the next two years I dropped in now and then at Pont Derfel, and so I can give an outline of the second Mrs Prhys's struggles there. At first her hus-

band was the only friend she had in the house, and he seemed half inclined sometimes to snarl because she had not succeeded in conciliating his children, friends, and even servants—for these, too, being old servants, had espoused their dead mistress's cause, and did their best to be disrespectful to their new mistress in the many ways in which ingeniously cantankerous old servants can be disrespectful with impunity to a new mistress, whom they do not like, in the second Mrs Prhys's circumstances. Margaret only showed her resentment of her domestic dethronement by being most icily deferential to her stepmother—most painfully anxious not to give even the most trivial order without her sanction. Saucy Guinevere was more openly hostile, and since Mrs Prhys never interfered with her, she did her rebellion by proxy through Jessie.

If it had not been for little-girl-reverenced 'grown-up sister Gwinny,' little Jessie would soon have been won over by her stepmother's loving gentleness, but Gwinny kept a sharp look-out over Jessie's allegiance to her dead memory. Before me—and, therefore, I can fancy what she would say when no stranger was present—Miss Guinevere would remark, when Mrs Prhys gave any direction to or about Jessie, '*Mamma* always did so-and-so, taking care to make the so-and-so almost flatly contradictory of her stepmother's orders. Gwinny could be a most agreeable girl when she liked, but poor Mrs Prhys could not have got much comfort out of her society during the first months on

their acquaintance. Owen was not much at home. When I met him there, he treated his stepmother, at first, with coldly scrupulous politeness—warmer than Margaret's, however, and without any irony in it, save inasmuch as that his sincere professions of gratitude for the trouble which his stepmother took to make him comfortable implied that he regarded her only in the light of a most courteously hospitable hostess. Tom at first showed *his* antipathy by being very rude. But Mrs Prhys's worst foes were not those of her own household. The late Mrs Prhys's female friends and relatives encouraged the servants in their passive insubordination, and egged on the children to active insolence. They talked also before strangers of and to Mrs Prhys in what I must call an abominable way. The fact that she was undeniably beautiful, of course, did not mollify these critics. They only made it an excuse for insinuations intended—fortunately fruitlessly—to excite her middle-aged husband's suspicious jealousy. They were never weary of throwing out inuendoes about artful poor girls who angled for rich old fools. Mrs Prhys was a forbearing Christian woman—perhaps, too, she was conscious that she had, in some measure, placed herself in a false position—but she did not think that her 'mission' in life was to be unresistingly trampled on; she asserted her position as mistress of the house far more firmly towards these outsiders than she did towards her stepchildren; and 'spoke up,' quietly, courteously, without the slightest asperity, and yet

pungently, in a way that made her uncharitable critics wince, and therefore hate her all the more. Altogether, for the first seven or eight months of her married life, Mrs Prhys's experiences must have had a good deal more cloud than sunshine in them. She had to struggle to look her inner little world and outer little world in the face with cheerful calmness, and sometimes, when she had not to look them in the face, her face wore a look of mournful resignation to disappointed hopes of happiness that it was sad to see in the eyes and on the lips of a young wife who would count so few months since her honeymoon.

The first Christmas Day after Prhys's second marriage I spent at his house.

Things were strangely changed at Pont Derfel. Prhys was beaming with pleasure, and strutting about with peacock-pride, at being able to show me that he had chosen, after all, a model wife. The servants, instead of endeavouring to misunderstand her orders, were anxious to anticipate her wishes. Tom put his arm round her waist, and got up, on his side, a very clumsy waltz, to convince me of his fondness for her. Little Jessie sat on her knee, snuggling up to her, kissing her, and calling her 'dear mamma.' Gwinny said to me, 'Oh, I do love her so now—I could love her with my whole heart, if papa didn't want me to call her mamma.' Owen, down from London for his holidays, was as assiduously attentive to her as if she had been his lady-love, and yet managed to throw a thoroughly filial

hue of respect over his affectionate gallantry. Margaret was not there. She had married, and was spending Christmas at her own home; but she had written the most prettily, almost affectionately worded of notes to express her regret at not being able to accept 'mamma's kind invitation for Christmas.' Outside the house, also, even amongst a few of the late Mrs Prhys's female friends, I found that the second Mrs Prhys had become a favourite. This was partly because of her every-day gentle goodness—mainly, perhaps, if a quantitative as well as qualitative analysis could have been made of the favour with which she had come to be regarded; and partly—mainly, no doubt, most of those who had changed their opinion about her thought—because in a fever which had broken out in the crowded cluster of filthy cottages in which the iron-workers lived, and had been carried thence to Pont Derfel, she had been a ministering angel abroad, and the tenderest of nurses at home. All her Pont Derfel patients had recovered, and she was now the idol of the family.

In the spring a baby-boy was born, but died a few weeks afterwards. A short time before father and mother would have been the only ones in the family to rejoice at such a birth, to grieve greatly for such a death; but times were changed. The baby during his little lie had a troop of loving worshippers, and when he died he was as widely and affectionately mourned. Guinevere and Jessie often went with Mrs Prhys to the little fellow's grave—a coffin-shaped little

flower-bed, with a little headstone simply inscribed, 'Dear little Arthur,' with the date of his death beneath. I do not know a more picturesque burial-place than that in which little Arthur lies—the graveyard of old St. Derfel's Church. It is the bottom of a sheltered hollow in rough-grassed, limestone-littered hills. Furnaces, rolling-mills, collieries, ironstone-pits, tramways, railways, are at work all round, but there is no sign of them up and down there. The old church has not had a congregation in it for centuries—it is a roofless ruin. Crumbling, glassless, perpendicular windows gape in the two parallel east gable-ends. Both high-pitched roofs have tumbled in, all that remains of them being a hanging-garden of moss and fern, stone-leek and weeds and wild-flowers, fattening on slimy slate and stone and rotten rafters, and overshadowed by drooping clumps of the hairy-stemmed ivy that has climbed the eastern gables, and even to the top of the western bell-gable, in which still hang two old bells, with a thick crust of rust over their *Fulgura-frango* legends. The dank limestone of the low side-walls and loftier gables is speckled with varicoloured lichens, and the mortar-lines are muffled up in velvet moss. Inside the church you can pick blackberries, if you care to struggle through the rank jungle of brier and grass that surges around the cracked octagonal font, in whose stagnant rain-water dropping snails involuntarily baptize themselves, and about whose hidden pedestal the slow-worm writhes. Frogs croak where the altar used to stand; every ivy-leaf seems to have a chirping or chat-

tering bird under it by day;—and when the moonlight falls on the chipped-nosed, grinning gargoyles, ghostly-white owls and ghostly-dusky bats brush past them with noiseless wing. Perhaps the old church might seem rather eerie by moonlight, or after dusk, but the old churchyard, with spring sunlight quietly pouring on its mourner-planted flowers and God-planted primroses, that star the grass, and gleam, purely, coolly bright, from every cranny in the mossy churchyard wall, is a place in which the dead—the dead who died hundreds of years ago, the dead who died yesterday—seem really to be *sleeping* peacefully.

It was in this churchyard that Guinevere became thoroughly reconciled to her stepmother. Poor Mrs Prhys was sitting by her little boy's grave, she told me, sobbing bitterly. Guinevere, crying too, was trying to comfort her, but the thought that Guinevere, kind as she had become, could not own her as her mother, somehow made the young mother bereaved of the child that would have been indisputably her own, sob all the more. Suddenly, as if she had divined her feelings, Guinevere flung her arms around her stepmother's neck, exclaiming, 'Mamma—my own dear mamma! I *will* call you so, and always. My own dear mamma in heaven won't blame me—you *are* so good and kind.'

XIII.

WIDOW MULLINS'S MANGLE.



OMEBODY has said that no action can properly be called a trifle, because, however trifling it may seem, most momentous consequences may spring from it; and a converse analogy attaches to 'uninteresting objects.' However uninteresting they may look, even a smashed plate, an old hat, a yard of cheap ribbon, might be found to be tragically, pathetically, or most cheerfully 'interesting,' if we only knew their history. The *blasé* man's affectation of satiated omniscience is a very shallow sham. It is because he knows so little, instead of so much, of things in general that he is, or pretends to be, so weary of them. He plumes himself on his 'culture;' but that must be a comical kind of culture whose fruit is identical with the product of utter lack of culture—languid indifference to everything that does not affect the comfort of the observer. Our drawling cynics

look sharp enough after *that*. I have no patience with these 'there's nothing new, and nothing true—and no matter' gentry. I should like to vary their experience by giving them a week in a stone-yard. To take an outsider's place in life seems to me a proof that the conceited outsider, who would fain be thought so philosophical, has not only a hard, and possibly cowardly, heart, but also, *au fond*, a sluggish mind. I feel inclined to grin, and then to growl, instead of taking off my hat, when I see a man perching himself up above the world in which his fellows are struggling, like the poet's jackdaw. That kind of behaviour 'don't sound pretty,' as the Yankees say, even in an Epicurean god; but to see a being, who may perhaps be an Epicurean, but who is not a bit more like a god than the fellow-creatures he loftily looks down upon, giving himself such airs, 'raises my corruption,' to borrow another Yankee phrase. I am thankful that I never attained such a height of culture, but have grown up a plain man, able to take an interest even in a poor woman's mangle.

Mrs Mullins was one of the numerous exceptions I have found to what a good many people consider a rule without exception—to wit, that any one who is really anxious for work can always get it. Her husband was a labourer in a Poplar ship-yard, a hard-working fellow, but—another exception to the aforesaid rule—for months before his death he had been idle perforce, owing to a strike on the skilled workmen, which had converted the once crowded, clattering yards into silent solitudes, dole-

fully bristled with bare poles, between which not a single craft was growing into shipshape. St. Alphege Mullins (he was a country parish orphan, and believed that he had received that eccentric Christian name from the parochial authorities—at any rate, he had no other to answer to) had managed somehow to rub on without resorting to the relieving-officer or the relief committees, but all that he had to leave his wife was furniture so scanty that it was not worth seizing for rent, debts to his landlord, the doctor, and the chandler, a family of five hollow-cheeked boys and girls, the eldest of whom was not six years old, and a memory which Widow Mullins cherished with a pathetico-comic reverence. Our poor St. Alphege was canonized by his relict, at any rate, although his merits merely consisted in not having shirked work when he could get it, and in not having wasted so much of his wages at the public-house as a good many of his compeers wasted—with the corollary that he had not treated his wife and children so harshly as his bearish humour might have led him to do if he had oftener got drunk. These negative virtues, however, made him a veritable saint in Widow Mullins's eyes—eyes reverted on the past. 'We never knows 'ow good folks is till we lose 'em—when they're dead we learns to vally 'em,' the poor recently-bereaved widow sobbed. 'He never riz 'is 'and aginst me, excep' when he was downright muddled wi' the drink; an' if I on'y caught 'im betimes a-Saturdays, he'd come 'ome wi' me like a lamb, he would. There ain't many women can say as

much as that. Ah, Hally, my boy, you take pattern by your father. A saint he were by name, an' a saint he were by natur.' The 'Hally' thus apostrophized was Widow Mullins's eldest boy, Alphege. Even in her husband's case Widow Mullins had felt conscientious scruples as to the propriety of attributing saintship to a '*livin*' human creetur,' and, therefore, when the boy was christened, the 'St.' had been dropped. 'You must call a babby short, you sec, St. Halphege,' she had said to her husband, 'an' it seems agin' Scriptur' to talk about St. Hally or St. Fidgy. You'll know your names, too, if we keeps 'em separate. He'll 'ave his father's name, arter all, bless 'is 'eart, an' I'm sure if he was a hearl's son, he couldn't 'ave one that could sound finer. It seems bumpious like for the likes of us to 'ave a son o' the name o' Halphege. He might be a wycount, so far as 'is name goes. But it fits you well, it do, St. Halphege, an' who's a better right to it than 'is own father's son?'

Hally, when bidden to tread in his deceased father's steps, was old enough to be sceptical as to the natural sanctity of the paternal exemplar held up before his eyes. Saints who were very fond of boxing the ears of little boys 'as wasn't doin' nuffink' were very queer holinesses in Hally's estimation. Still in process of time the mother's talk confused the recollections of the Mullins family, and it became a tradition amongst them that the 'dear departed' was a model husband and father, in whose lifetime they had 'known better days.' Widow Mullins fel very angry with herself when she caught

herself thinking now and then that, so far as fag and anxiety were concerned, her husband's death had made very little difference to her. On every anniversary of his death, so long as her children lived with her, or were within her reach, the whole family went on pious pilgrimage to the smoky cemetery in which he was buried, and planted a fresh cheap flower at the head of his stoneless grave. A workhouse looked over the cemetery palisades; the noise of work brawled all round the little island of quietness in which worked-out East-enders were resting at last; but grass grew in it, and little trees, and flowers that somebody had time to tend, although the Mullinses always found their flower of the previous year shrivelled up into bloomless black-jaundice; and therefore the little Mullinses looked upon their annual visit to the cemetery as a trip into the country, and ran about quite merrily when out of the lodge-keeper's sight, whilst Widow Mullins sat by the grave having 'a quiet cry' as she thought of the times in which she began to 'keep company with Mullins,' and when they were 'asked in church;' and yet not entirely wishing to have him back. She had an idealised St. Alphege embalmed in her memory, whom it had become almost pleasant to grieve for, since she could make a shift to live without the real St. Alphege, whose actual lineaments would—strive as hard as she might against the blasphemous intrusion—sometimes pop up and peer unpleasantly through her fancy picture.

Very sore were her shifts to live in the first years of

her widowed life. The workhouse was always staring at the one-roomed 'home' of the widow and the orphan as well as at the father's grave. In the East-end we have the poor always with us—*always*, with a dismal emphasis; but when Mullins died, poverty was so widespread in Poplar that 'exceptional cases' there ceased to be exceptional, and a mere widow with five children could not expect much attention if she was above stooping to the tricks by which experienced hands in mendicancy managed to make an exceptionally good living out of benevolence that was not always beneficence. Ever hasting, never resting, however, Widow Mullins managed to keep herself and her children out of 'the house.' Now and then she got a relief-ticket, but as a rule she contrived to earn her family's daily bread, with dripping for a treat on Sundays, and weak, milkless, sugarless, tea-dust tea. Sometimes they fasted, at no time did they have a very full meal, even of their humble fare, but still body and soul were somehow kept together. The widow even managed to put by money—a penny or two, sometimes a halfpenny, sometimes a farthing, saved by going without a candle. The landlord had forgiven her husband's arrears of rent, chiefly, perhaps, because he saw that he had small chance of recovering them in a hurry; and, trusting to her honesty, let her pay as she could for the one room, which was all that she could now venture to occupy. The doctor had looked glum for a minute when he found there was no cash forthcoming for his attendance and medicines—and why

should hard-working medical men be thought brutes, any more than any other hard-working men, for looking glum when they cannot get their wages—and money out of pocket, too?—but he had soon said, ‘Well, well, Mrs Mullins, it can’t be helped. I’m sure I’m very sorry for you. You need not trouble yourself about my account. I wish I could do more for you.’ The Chandler, also, had allowed her to make a fresh start with a clean slate. And thus Widow Mullins was able to put by her scanty coppers. She had conceived a great ambition. If she had but a mangle, she fancied, she would be a made woman; and in a broker’s shop in Poplar High Street she had noticed a mangle chalked, ‘A bargain—23s. 6d.’ It *was* a bargain, since it was a very serviceable affair, but it had been bought for a trifle, and in that impecunious time a low price was necessary to tempt purchasers. Still 23s. 6d., though a small sum for the mangle, was a very large sum for Mrs Mullins to raise. She was a brave woman, however, and went on putting away her coppers, anxiously glancing at the broker’s shop when she chanced to pass it, and sometimes paying special visits to it in order to make sure that her coveted treasure was still for sale. Hally got to understand the meaning of these inspections, and took almost as much interest in them as his mother. 6s. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. was the amount which the Widow Mullins found in her old stocking at the end of a week in which she had been so unusually fortunate, that she was able to raise her deposit to 7s. 6d. at a bound. ‘Let’s go an’ have a look at

mother's mangle, Hally; on'y sixteen shillin's more, an' Hally shall 'ave a ride on it,' she exclaimed in unwonted spirits, as she and her little boy started to take a Saturday night peep at it. But when they reached the shop, an old man was bargaining with the broker for the mangle. 'Will you send it round for that?' queried the old man. 'It ain't yours—that's mother's mangle,' cried Hally, with a quivering lip. This led to an explanation, and Widow Mullins, who had thought that the mangle was irrevocably lost, obtained it, to her delighted astonishment, that very night. The old man who had been bargaining for it knew something of Widow Mullins—that she was thoroughly honest, at any rate—and determined to run the risk of trying to do something like a kindness, and secure a profit simultaneously. He bought the mangle, and sent it round to the widow's house on receipt of the 7s. 6d., and a promise to pay *eighteen* shillings more in as prompt instalments as possible.

The mangle seemed for a time to bring good fortune to the widow's home. She obtained mangling to do, as well as a mangle to do it with, with unexpected rapidity. As soon as the sun was up, and long after it had set, the rumbling of the rollers was heard. The little Mullinses lugged about laden clothes-baskets that might have served them for beds. They jumped up and butted like little rams at the lumbering box as it went to and fro, under the firm impression that they assisted materially in its propulsion. They rode backwards and forwards triumphantly on the Juggernaut car of linen. The mangle

was the little family's bread-winner, and they loved it like a living thing.

Nearly half of the 18s. had been paid off, when there came a change of fortune. The old man died, and his widow, who had not approved of his kindness—economical though it was—to Widow Mullins, insisted, on having in future regular weekly payments. These poor Widow Mullins could not make, since just then work fell slack; and part of the compact being that if three-quarters of the 18s. were not paid by a certain date, all previous payments should be looked upon as hire, and the mangle revert to the original purchaser, the Mullins family was in despair; since the old man's widow expressed her intention of demanding the fulfilment of the bond without a single day of grace.

The day came, the stipulated proportion of the price had not been paid, and the one widow, refusing to take pity on the other, sent men to carry off the mangle.

The little Mullinses literally lifted up their voices and wept when they saw stranger hands sacrilegiously laid upon their idol. Poor Widow Mullins threw her apron over her face, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

That was the position when a jolly brown face looked in at the door, and a voice that had been made hoarse by hallooing and singing of anthems, in a very un-Falstaffian sense, shouted, 'Avast there, mates. What's up, my lass?' It was Capt. C——, locally known as 'The Ranting Skipper.' He was only a collier captain; he preached and prayed as if he was putting a ship about;

he sang like half a gale of wind, and administered consolation in the same tone in which he would have shouted, 'Stand by the royal halyards !' but for all that he was a true Christian comforter, and when Widow Mullins heard his voice off flew her apron. As soon as, in his own phrase, he had made out how the land lay, he bade the men 'hold on a bit,' and was off to the other widow's, whence he speedily returned with a receipt in full for the mangle made out to the Widow Mullins.

'Set not your heart on things below, sister,' he said reprovingly, as he pointed to her red eyes. 'If it had pleased the Lord to take your mangle, you shouldn't have murmured. Hows'ever, now let's have a werse,' and he sang the Doxology in a voice that shook the windows.

'He's a blessed man is Capt. C——, sir,' said Widow Mullins to me when she told me the story. 'He spoke jist as if the mangle was a dear friend as 'ad been on 'is death-bed, an' then the Lord 'ad raised 'im up agin. An' that was much 'ow I felt, an' the children too. They danced about like chimbley-sweeps, an' I couldn't 'elp pattin' an' strokin' it, as if it could tell 'ow pleased I were.'

XIV.

THE BLIND ORGANIST.



SILENCE and solitude may be found in the desert and the bush; but there they are expected. Silence-and-solitude lovers of the *haut goût* class should taste them in a City side-street on a Saturday night. The narrow roadway, choked with waggons throughout the week, winds along as empty as a dry water-course. Instead of jostling, or being jostled into the gutter, and swinging round lamp-posts and side-posts, you have the whole little ledge of footpath to yourself. Manchester warehouses and piles of offices are as dark and voiceless as sealed pyramids. The squat tavern at the middle corner, whose plate-glass lunchcon-bar is thronged from twelve till two, recovers its old-fashioned look on Saturday night, and seems, indeed, to have become sceptical as to its *raison d'être* in that hive by day (except Sundays), but sepulchre by night (especially Saturday night),

as it mopes customerless and with its gas half turned down. The only living creatures that you come across are, perhaps, a sauntering policeman, trying doors and shutters and padlocked bars, and one or two old men and women, feebly beating old mats outside the old church portals. „Open, and with the cleaners' dim light or two inside, the dusty-brown, pepper-and-salt, and grey-white old churches are the liveliest-looking buildings in the locality. They have woke up into semi-consciousness after their week-long trance. After all, it is a very flickering life they have recovered ; but the oppressively busy places about them have gone to sleep until Monday morning, and so the old churches pluck up courage to remember the days when Wren built them because they were wanted.

Some years ago, on a moonlight Saturday night, I stopped at the open door of a church in a hushed City street. 'Luther's Hymn' was pealing out into the quiet little thoroughfare through which no one fared except myself. There is fact in the old fables about the *leading* influences of music. Something in the way in which that fine old tune was played led me into the dark porch, and along the dim aisles, and up the moon-flecked gallery stairs, and so to a pew next the organ-loft. It was an island of brightness in the dusky old church. A broad slant of moonlight through a side-window burnished the heavy organ-case, and its swollen-cheeked cherubs and tarnished gilt pipes ; shot with silvery tissue the faded folds of the curtains of the loft ;

and transmuted like an alchymist the greasy brass rods and rings from which they hung. And in the very core of the brightness there were two faces, striking in themselves, but glorified by the light in which they gleamed. One was young and one was old, but there was a strong family likeness between the two, which—to make use of an oxymoron—the moonlight brought out with a soft vividness. A grey-haired, grey-bearded old man was playing the organ. He was blind; but he ran down the keys, lifted his long fingers from one key-board to the other, pulled out and pushed in the stops, and placed his feet upon the pedals, with the deft certainty that is so startling in the blind; it seems as if unseen guardian angels must be guiding them. With long curls that made a drooping glory about her head, a beautiful little girl, but with an expression of face that, perhaps, can be best described as ‘old-fashioned,’ sat on a hassock, watching the old man. He was the church organist, practising his next day’s tunes, and she was his grand-daughter, at once his *protégée* and protectress. I got to know them afterwards (they lived in lodgings at Dalston, where the old man eked out the salary he had from the church with his earnings as a tuner of pianos), and at different times I learnt the old man’s history. I remember enough of his turns of speech to put it into his own mouth with tolerable fidelity:—

‘I lost my sight when I was ten years old. It was one Fifth of November night, and I was letting off fireworks with other boys on Hackney Downs. A jack-in-

the-box wouldn't light, and, like a foolish lad, I kneeled down to blow the spark on the blue paper. All of a sudden it went off bang in my face, almost stifling me with the smoke. I didn't wonder at first that I couldn't see; but when two or three minutes had gone by, and still I couldn't see, and my eyes burned as if a red-hot poker was being bored into them, an awful fear came over me. I felt almost certain then that I should never see again. One of the boys led me home. It was so strange to have to be led—to go groping about as if I was playing at blindman's buff where I had been running along so full of fun just before. I heard the crackers going off, and the squibs banging, and the people rushing about and laughing and shouting; and I felt angry.

'My father and mother weren't rich folks by any means; but still they weren't exactly poor folks. Father had regular work at some nursery gardens at Homerton, and mother used to send us to school and take us to church, and keep the house respectable. I was poor mother's pet, and father was very fond of me, too. I was getting on at school, and he was fond of books, and so he was proud of me. When I went in, and mother heard what had happened, she gave a scream, and then she hugged me till I could hardly breathe, and then she fell a-sobbing, and saying, "However shall I tell father?" Father came in whilst she was saying it, and at first he was quite savage with mother. I never heard him speak to her in that way before. He said that she had no

business to let me go out ; but poor mother called out, " Oh, don't, don't ! I do wish I hadn't ; but I thought it would pleasure the poor boy." And then father said, kinder, " Well, mother, don't cry like that—that won't mend it," and went out to fetch a doctor. A doctor's young man came and bathed my eyes, and told me to get to bed and go to sleep. Father and mother got me into bed as if I had been a baby ; but it wasn't so easy to go to sleep. My eyes burned as if I had two coals in my head, and I was thinking whether I should be able to see the daylight when it came. .

'Next morning mother dressed me and fed me—it wasn't much breakfast I could eat—and put a shade over my eyes, and took me to a regular doctor in Mare Street. He said he wasn't much used to such cases, but would give mother a note to a clever eye-doctor in Finsbury Square. We went to this gentleman's half a dozen times and more, and he told mother what she was to get made up at the chemist's, but at last he said it was no use our going any more—the nerve was quite destroyed. He was a kind Christian gentleman. He patted me on the head and said, " You may be very happy, my poor little fellow, though you'll never see again till you open your eyes in heaven. Jesus will guide you there if you ask Him, though he doesn't go about now giving sight to the blind. Try to be good, and make up your mind to be able to do something well, though you can't see."

'For a long time after that I did nothing but mope at home. I must have been a sad trial to poor mother, but

she was always gentle with me, and wouldn't let the children cross me in anything. They were very kind, too, but they couldn't be expected to put up with my peevishness as she did. Father always had me by him, and made much of me when he was at home, and tried to get me to take an interest in something, instead of sulking in a corner. I soon learnt to find my way about. Father saw I was afraid that my brother (a year younger than me, would get ahead of me in learning, now I didn't go to school ; so, when Tom learnt his lessons in the evening, father made him say them out loud, and I could soon learn them quicker than Tom with the book before him. Father read books to me, too ; and, after he had guided my hand a bit, I could write without feeling where the paper ended. Of course I don't know how my writing looks, but I can write as easily, I expect, as if I had my eyes, and people seem to be able to make it out.

'I always had an ear for music. Before I had my accident, I used to pick up tunes and play them on a whistle and the jew's-harp. The first birthday I was blind father gave me a little fiddle—at least he left it at home for mother to give me, that it might seem to come from her too. He had picked it up secondhand at a pawnshop, and it really was a famous little fiddle. That little fiddle first made me feel as if I could be quite happy again. There was a man next door who taught me which finger I ought to use, but I seemed to know by nature how high up the string I ought to go. He had played the fiddle all his life, but he couldn't bring out as

true notes, or keep as good time, as I could when I had been at it six weeks. Of course it's nothing to boast of, but it's something to be thankful for. God is very good, even when we poor creatures presume to think Him unkind. I *do* know what I've lost in my eyes, but I've no wish now to have them back. I've got no use to being blind, that I should have to begin all over again if I could see. As the kind doctor said, I can wait for that till I open my eyes in heaven.

'But I was talking about my little fiddle. I soon picked up all the tunes I heard in the street, and all I heard at church. Before I got my fiddle, I used to like to listen to the organ at church. People who had got eyes, I thought, couldn't enjoy that more than I did. But after I had got my fiddle, I didn't feel so sore about other people being better off than I was.' I can't help thinking that it was a God's messenger. God has put the music into things, and if He is good enough to give you the power to bring it out, you ought to be grateful instead of bragging. The miners don't make what they dig up.

'I was ever so much better tempered after I had got my fiddle. I began to think whether I couldn't earn something to help father and mother. I knew how to net cabbage nets, and father was pleased when he saw that I wanted to do something, and got me some fruit-nets to do for his master. Sometimes I went out for a walk with Tom and Sissy over Hackney Common, or on to the Downs, or along Clapton, and down by the Lea Bridge

Road. At first they used to tell me which way we were going, but I soon got to know almost as well as they did. *How?* Why, the bricks at the corners have notches in them, and some posts have rings, and some have rails, and some have spikes, and some have chains, and some haven't; and you can smell lilacs, and herrings, and such-like; and you get to understand voices, and how carts and 'buses rumble. I'm only timorous now when I cross the roads—though I needn't be, for my little Rosie would be run over twenty times herself before she'd let me be hurt. Besides, everybody is kind to blind people.

'From the time I turned eleven till I was about thirteen, I got quite contented at home, though I couldn't help wondering sometimes what would happen to me if father and mother were to die. They did die when I was thirteen, and Tom and Sissy too. Scarlet fever was very bad in Hackney; and they had it, and I had it. When I came to myself, they were all dead and buried, and I was in the workhouse. I knew I wasn't at home in a moment, because the room felt bigger. The man next door had saved my fiddle for me, and when I was safe to be spoke to he brought it to me, and when I'd given the bow one draw, I felt I wasn't quite alone in the world. But I broke down before I got through my first tune, it made me think so of poor father and mother, and Tom and little Sissy. When the workhouse master found I could play the fiddle, he told the parish gentlemen, and they thought I might make a living that way. So they rigged me out in a fresh suit of clothes (they'd

burnt the ones I went in), and told me to come back if I couldn't get on, and then sent me out with my fiddle. They'd told the master to find me a bed somewhere, and he had spoken to a woman who lived down by the Triangle, who knew mother. The first morning I went out, I got her to let her little boy go with me to the churchyard, to take me to where father and mother, and Tom and Sissy were buried. I felt all over them and the graves next about, that I might find my way back, and I stuck a bit of tile in father and mother's grave, and an oyster-shell in Tom and Sissy's, to make sure, and I've been back there many a time since then.

'I got on very well in Hackney at first. The people knew something about me, and always gave me pennies. But at last they got tired, and I had to work out to Kingsland and Stoke Newington, and up Stamford Hill, or else along Hackney Road into Shoreditch, because I knew those parts pretty well, and could get on if I asked once or twice where I was. But, after a bit, I had to go into parts where I'd never been when I could see, and that was puzzling at first, but I soon got used to it. I had to give up my bed in the Triangle, though, because it was so tiring to get back at night; but I always tried to have some little place that I could call my own. I've slept in lodging-houses—no, I was never in the Mint, but I've been in Wentworth Street. Sometimes I got a clean bed and heard clean talk, but mostly both were very bad. No, I was never robbed—except once by a blind man. I had given him my money to count, and he walked off

with it. But when the other lodgers found it out, though they laughed at first, they soon made him give it back again.

‘I always went to church or chapel three times a day on Sunday. I learnt ever so many tunes that way, but it wasn’t that only that made me go, though from a boy I’ve always been fond of the organ. It takes you off your feet, and floats you along like a great sea. I never saw the sea, and never shall, but I always couple the sea and organ-playing together. Besides the music, I used to like to sit and rest in the churches ; there is much that is comforting to blind people in the Bible. In the evenings sometimes I used to give pennies to boys and girls to get them to read to me, but they didn’t read as the ministers do, of course ; and they used to weary of the Bible, and want to read me the police reports. I am well off now, for my Little Rosie reads me the Bible by the hour together, besides the newspaper and all kinds of books ; but I used to wish in old times that I had been taught to read for myself like the blind men on the bridges. I have sat down by them sometimes, and wondered that they did not seem to enjoy it more. I could soon have picked it up, I think, but then I should have had to go into an institution, and I didn’t like the thought of living on charity. I didn’t reckon it charity getting money by playing the fiddle. If people gave me money, I gave them music ; so it was a bargain. No, I never played in public-houses. I had the offer more than once, but I should have had to play tunes I didn’t like,

and to hear all kinds of bad language ; and, besides, it seems a shame to play just to encourage people to get drunk. Music wasn't meant for that.

' I lived by my fiddle till I was thirty, and about that time I fell in with my dear wife. How she came to marry a blind man I don't know (except that God 'sent her to bless me), for she was five years younger than me, and had a good place, and was a very beautiful woman. You seem to wonder how I know that, but I can tell what people look like by running my hand over their face. To touch hers was like playing. She had seen me at church, and took pity on me, I suppose, because I had nobody else to care for me. Anyhow, we were married, but she did not like me to go about fiddling, and so before we married I managed to learn basket-making at odd times. I could have made more by my fiddle sometimes, but she did clear-starching, and so we managed to get on. We lived at Tottenham, and I never was so happy in my life. It would have been pleasant, after having been lonely so long, to have anyone to care for me, but my poor dear Jane was as sweet-tempered as an angel. We had one boy, little Rosie's father, and both his mother and I doated on him. He was such a fine-spirited, handsome little fellow. I am afraid we spoiled him, poor lad. When he was six years old, his poor mother died. She had been sitting up with a sick neighbour of ours, and got her feet wet coming home. If it hadn't been for Jack, I am afraid that I should have been wicked enough to kill myself. I felt

over again just as I did when I was struck blind. But there was little Jack to look after, and I soon grew ashamed of those wicked feelings. I couldn't live in Tottenham any longer though. Her grave in the churchyard was the only thing homelike, and I could go to that whenever I liked. I moved first to Highgate to be near, and little Jack and I used to walk over the meadows to Tottenham churchyard on Sunday afternoons. I had got work at Highgate, but after a bit I was obliged to give up basket-making. I had sent little Jack to a dame's school, and when I sat twisting the sticks in and out all by myself, without hearing Jane going about and stopping to talk to me as she used, I felt as if I should go mad. I hardly liked to take to fiddling again, because she hadn't liked it ; but it wouldn't harm her now, I thought, and there didn't seem anything else I could do. If I didn't keep on moving about and playing, I felt so lonely that I was afraid of myself. Jack and I lived in one place and another ; but, wherever we were, I tried to do the best I could for him ; and paid the people we lived with extra to look after him when I was away. But I oughtn't to have left him to himself so much. He got into scrapes, and when I came back I hadn't the heart to punish him. At last, the bad companions he had got amongst led him astray, and he ran off. From the time he was twelve, I never heard anything of him till he was dying. That was a sore trial to me, for I was very fond of my poor Jack, for his own sake, as well as his dear mother's.

‘I was lonelier than ever for many a year after that—lonelier, that is, in one way; but I learned what was worth being lonely for, and that was to see that God was my friend, and that He’d taken my wife and child away to make me go to Him. Sometimes I went on basket-making, and I had picked up mat-making too, and now and then I did a bit of netting. But I went out playing at times. I learned the harp about five years after poor Jack went away, and a man that used to come to play the fiddle with me put me up to the way of tuning pianos, though it was no use to me then, because I hadn’t any connection. I used to blow the bellows, too, for an organist on the other side of the water, and when he found that I had a taste for music, he taught me how to finger, and let me play a bit when he went to practise. He was very kind, and it was through him I got my organ in the City.

‘But now I have to tell you how I got my little Rosie. I had been playing the harp every Monday night for four or five weeks in the Old Kent Road, when one night up came a woman and asked me whether my name was John S—. “Yes,” I said. “Well, then,” she said, “you must come with me, for your son wants you, and he’s a-dying.” She led me out of the road, and round a corner or two, and up some stairs, and into a little room, and told me to sit down on the bed. Presently I heard my poor Jack say, “Oh, father, I’ve come to no good, and I’m dying, and there’s no one to look after my poor Rosie, if you won’t.” I didn’t know who Rosie was till

I felt a little curly head in my hands, and then a little wet face against mine. She took to me from the first, dear heart. Poor little thing, she'd been lying crying with her arms round her father's neck. I kissed her, and I kissed him, and I promised to take care of Rosie. Oh, how glad I was to get her! She seemed somehow to tie me on again to my poor boy and my dear wife. My Jack died about half an hour after I went in, and he hadn't strength to speak again. I buried him at Nunhead. All his money was gone, poor boy. The people of the house couldn't tell me anything about him, except that he'd been with them for a month and more, and had seen me in the road, but was ashamed to speak to me. But, when he felt he was dying, he'd told the woman that I was his father, and sent her out to see if she could find me. Rosie was too young to tell me anything; she didn't even know anything about her mother. I may have almost run against him many a time. It's easy for people who have got their eyes to lose each other like that in London. The first winter I had my little pet, we were hard pushed. I had the rheumatism, and could neither work nor play. We should both have been obliged to go into the workhouse, if it hadn't been for my good friend the organist. He found us out, after a bit, and took a great fancy to Rosie. Everybody does. There isn't a feature in her face like her grandmother's; and yet when I run my hand over it, it plays just the same tune in another key. So my good friend helped us himself, and got others to help us; and, when I could

go about again, he encouraged me to improve myself on the organ, and let me play for him on week days—and Sundays, too, sometimes—to give me nerve. And then, when there was a vacancy in the City, he spoke for me, and I was fortunate enough to please on my trial Sunday, and got the place. If God should spare me now to see my little Rosie settled well, I should be as happy as this earth can make me. He may be pleased to do it, for I am hale and hearty yet; and then, perhaps, I shall be grumbling at having to give her up. She's all I've got, you know, to stand for wife and son, alive; and then she's such a darling herself. I've been able to put her to a very good school, and she is getting on nicely. She plays the piano very prettily already, and I play with her on the old fiddle; and *that* goes on getting better every year it lives. It's a pity *we* don't copy after fiddles as we get old. In the winter evenings Rosie and I sit by the fire when she's done her lessons, and she reads so prettily, and talks so prettily, and plays so prettily, and is so fond of me, that it is like a little heaven below to a lonely old man; and in the summer evenings, we walk about those parts where I used to go about fiddling when I was a boy. She says that she should have liked to go about with me then, as she does now. Sometimes we've a service in the middle of the week, and then we go into the City together; but, mostly, Saturday is the only week-day we go in. Rosie likes having the church all to ourselves and the organ. On Sundays we start directly after breakfast. We take dinner and tea at the pew-

opener's. She is a very decent woman, and has got a neat little room looking into the churchyard. It's quieter on a Sunday even than we are here. And then we walk home in the evening, and have supper and a tune and prayers, and go to bed as happy as if she was Princess Royal and I was her father. When I'm playing out the congregation after evening service, I often think that, through God's goodness, my life is getting played out somehow the same way. I'm going home to rest, with music to soothe me before I fall asleep.'

XV.

‘“HE COMETH NOT,” SHE SAID.’



IT was Isabella Bradley who said so—not with her lips, but in her heart; and though she strove to keep her heart's talk to herself, thinking it poor-spirited and unmaidenly to make an *ad misericordiam* parade of her sorrow, though she went through her round of duties with quiet cheerfulness, and would laugh and chat as if she had no trouble, it was impossible for her to hide her grief as completely as she, perhaps, thought she did—to put her dying hope away in a corner in which no one could see her nursing it with fond, sad, secret tears. When she supposed that nobody was looking at her, her young face grew rigid with a prematurely ‘set’ expression, and there was a wearily-waiting longing in her clouded eyes.

Isabella Bradley, when I first knew her, was governess to the children of her uncle, a dumpling-like, red-faced, commonplace, good-natured little friend of mine, a

wholesale provision dealer, who had married the sister of Isabella's mother. Her mother had long been dead. Dr Bradley, her father, a physician in Cheltenham, had looked down on his London 'brother-in-law,' Mr Phipps, because Mr Phipps was a man of no 'culture ;' and yet he had angrily half-envied him whilst he despised him, because the provision-dealer got more money out of the sale of such vulgar commodities as cheese and bacon, sent out in waggons, with 'Phipps & Co.,' in staring white letters, on their tarpaulins, from a dim, grimy cavern in that intensely vulgar locality, Whitechapel, than the doctor got from his invalid dowagers and retired Indians. Dr Bradley would never have had any intercourse with Mr Phipps, had not the doctor often been inclined to borrow money, and his brother-in-law at first disposed to lend it to him. The best-natured man, however, is likely to tire of lending when he *never* gets paid ; and the doctor's pay-day being invariably the Greek Calends, he, after a time, found himself unable to extract another loan from Mr Phipps. He then broke off all connection with him ; and all that his daughter had heard of her uncle from her father was, that he was a 'mean-spirited, miserly, grasping, purse-proud little snob.'

The doctor died, and although he had had a considerable practice, and Isabella was his only child, she found that she had been left almost literally without a penny. Her father had been a very extravagant man, and had died deep in debt. She felt very desolate. She

had no intimate friends ; and the only connections who *could* do anything for her.were just the ones who *would* not, as she had been taught to believe—the vulgar, stingy Uncle and Aunt Phipps, who had not seen her since she was a baby. She was, therefore, greatly surprised when a note came from her aunt offering her a home at her uncle's. Still there was something in this note that jarred upon her. Her aunt by blood was not really as well disposed towards her as her uncle by marriage. For one thing, her aunt was not as good-natured as her uncle ; and, then, the aunt had felt a good deal more keenly than the uncle had the *de haut en bas* tone which Isabella's father, and mother also, had adopted towards them. Mrs Phipps had no loving memory of her dead sister. Though Mrs Phipps was the elder sister, she had made what was socially considered the 'lower' match. Honest little red, round Phipps was worth a dozen of the tall, handsome doctor in a moral point of view, and though he did not 'cut a dash,' he had given his wife and her children a very comfortable home, and had made a comfortable provision for them after his death ; but Mrs Phipps knew that, in the queerly-arbitrary judgment of 'society,' her husband would rank below Dr Bradley, and, consequently, she would be considered inferior to her younger sister. Perhaps poor Mrs Bradley had been rather too fond of reminding her sister, directly and indirectly, of this fact, and of prattling familiarly about her husband's titled patients. At any rate, Mrs Phipps had never quite for-

given her younger sister—though she had been dead a dozen years at the time of which I am writing—for marrying long before she did, and marrying, besides, a handsome, moderately-fashionable physician, whilst only a worthy, well-to-do little wholesale cheese-and-bacon factor had been her draw in the matrimonial lottery. She did not think, by any means, that she had drawn a blank. She had a certain amount of sincere, though tepid, affection for little Phipps, and she had a thorough appreciation of the material advantages she had derived from her marriage. Still, she could not look upon honest little Phipps exactly in the light of a matrimonial prize, and she sourly remembered that her younger sister had laughed at him, and contrasted him, in every respect to his disadvantage, with *her* husband, and that Dr Bradley had been very rude to both herself and Phipps.

When, therefore, Phipps, reading his *Times* one morning at his snug breakfast-table, in his pretty, cosy Highgate home, suddenly dropped the paper, and exclaimed, ‘Look here, Jane, poor Bradley’s gone—like a snuffed candle: fell down dead getting out of his carriage, on his own door-step,’ Jane did not display nearly so much emotion as Sam did. ‘It’s a bit out of the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*,’ he added; ‘and it says, “We regret to hear that the deceased’s circumstances were terribly involved.” Poor chap! that’s no news to me. “We only allude to this painful fact to obtain an opportunity of contradicting, most emphatically, a heartless and ridiculously baseless rumour that has been founded on it,

that the unfortunate gentleman's death was his own deed.”

‘It's likely enough, though,’ was Mrs Phipps's charitable remark. (I had had a bed at Broadoaks the night before, and was present at the breakfast-table.) ‘Don't you think so, Mr ——? He was a vain, conceited man, and people had made a great deal of him. Anyhow, poor Bella used to make out they did. For my part, I could never see anything in him. My belief is that he *did* poison himself. It doesn't need much cleverness for a doctor to be able to do that without other people knowing—though, you see, some people have got a guess of how it really was; so he must have been a *very* poor hand at his trade, after all, though he did hold his head so high. His patients were falling off, and he couldn't live as he had been living, and was afraid of being pressed for bills, and so he killed himself like a coward—that's *my* impression. I'm thankful poor Bella isn't alive to see what her fine husband has brought himself to.’

I hope I was not uncharitable, but I could not help thinking that Mrs Phipps's profession of gratitude *sounded* more like an expression of regret that her sister was *not* alive to share the doctor's fall.

‘Nonsense, Jane, nonsense,’ answered Mr Phipps. ‘I can't make out you women. You'll *do* things for them you don't like a man wouldn't do, but you're ten times as fond as we are of thinking evil and speaking evil of 'em.—The poor girl—her name was Isabella, too,

wasn't it?—You must write to her at once, Jane, and tell her to come to us as soon as she can get away. I'd go down to the funeral, and bring her back with me, if I was quite sure that she wouldn't prefer my room to my company.'

'You needn't put yourself out of the way to get insulted,' his wife retorted. '*You'll* not be wanted at the funeral. There'll be plenty of fine folks at that, just to save appearances. Anyways, they'll send their empty carriages. Of course, when it's all over, *we* shall have to do something for the girl—none of her fine friends will, you may be sure.'

'I'm not sure that she has got so many fine friends as you fancy, Jane,' said honest little Phipps, 'and if she had, I shouldn't like strangers to do everything for your own sister's child, Jane. There's none nearer to her, none half so nigh, as we are, so far as I can make out.'

'Oh, of course, I will do what I can for the poor girl, but I don't see why she should come here. We can get her a governess's place somewhere, and ask her home for the holidays—that is, if she will condescend to come. You may depend upon it that she has been brought up in her father's ridiculous notions—and poor Bella was just as silly. Though she was my sister, I had no patience with her for giving in to her husband as she did. It *is* downright absurd for a woman to *worship* her husband, and echo all his nonsense.'

'I don't want you to worship me,' laughed jolly little Phipps, 'or to echo my nonsense, because, you know,

I never talks none. Just write a line to the poor girl, and tell her this is her home until she wants to find a better, and can find it.’

My presence at the breakfast-table restrained Mrs Phipps more than her children’s. Before both, however, she said:—

‘You’ll find you have made a mistake, if you have the girl to live here. She’ll make your own children look down on you. She’ll tell them that you aint a gentleman.’

‘I didn’t ever profess to be,’ laughed jolly little Phipps again. ‘For my part, I can’t make out what a gentleman *is*—there’s so many sorts. Is it your blood, or your money, or your trade, or your education, or your manners, or just fancying you’re one, that makes a gentleman of you? Different people, different opinions; some gentlemen may be like apples, but a good many are uncommonly like inions. I’ve got my notion of what a real gentleman *ought to be*, but I never saw him in the looking-glass, and precious few I’ve ever come across anywhere, and three parts of them, I suppose, the swells would call snobs. Now, children, say your grace, and give me a kiss, and be off into the garden. You and me, —, must be starting.’

When the children were gone, Phipps said more seriously, ‘Now, mind, Jane, you write a kind letter to the poor girl. Tell her that it’s my wish, as well as yours, that she should come and live with us, like one of our own, just as long as she likes, and that I’m ready

to run down to-morrow, if I, can be any use or comfort to her.'

His wife, who had to stoop to do it, gave Phipps a very sulky good-bye kiss, and me, because I had not taken her part, and had hard work to keep from *looking*, as well as feeling, entirely on Phipps's side, a very frozen hand-shake, or rather finger-touch; and then Phipps and I hurried out to the yellow omnibus that had stopped, according to custom, for him, and the conductor of which, although Phipps was a regular passenger, was pantomimically manifesting as much impatience as he could venture on under the circumstances.

Phipps's messages were sent to his niece, but in Mrs Phipps's words, and with Mrs Phipps's glosses. Isabella could read between the lines, and wrote back to say that she had made up her mind to earn her living as a governess, but that she should be very grateful if her kind uncle could spare time to be present at the funeral, and afterwards settle her little affairs, before she left her home.

'I suppose you must go, Sam,' said Mrs Phipps, as she gave her husband the letter. 'The girl has got more sense than I thought—I never said a word to her about going out as a governess. Perhaps, though, it's only stuck-up pride. She won't be beholden to us—and yet she wants you to go down. She's her father's own child. When she's pushed, she isn't above making use of them she looks down on. Don't you involve yourself, Sam. You're weak with women, when it isn't your own wife

that asks you for things. ‘It was Bradley, and not you, that married poor Bella, and you’ve your own children to look after, if you don’t care for me.’

I would not have heard all that if I could have helped it, but Mrs Phipps prevented me from helping it. The moment she heard Phipps’s latch-key fumbling in the keyhole, on our arrival together from the City a day or two after the date of the last previously reported conversation, she rushed into the hall, and delivered her *concio ad maritum* on the door-mat. Phipps, as well as his niece, could read between lines. The next day he went down to Cheltenham, staying there until the funeral was over, and he had settled his niece’s ‘little affairs’ in the best way he could. This settlement consisted chiefly in saving for her a few little articles of personal property which she would have allowed to be swept away in the irate rush that was made upon her insolvent father’s ‘effects.’ There was only one mourning coach, that followed his hearse, and in that Phipps rode with his niece. As Mrs Phipps had predicted, there were sundry private carriages in the funeral-train, and, Phipps told me, ‘their jarvies looked as if they’d strike, when they saw they’d only got our coach to follow ; but I didn’t see the sense, nor Bella neither, of asking a lot of folks that didn’t care a fig about him, to follow the poor chap. Poor fellow, he used to look down on me, and so far as looks, and manners, and his sort of cleverness went, he’d reason to ; but, between ourselves, he was next door to a swindler, and he made a rare mess of his swindling too.

I'm not sure now that he *didn't* kill himself, poor fellow. Everything was in such a muddle. He'd got no method in his tricks. The people seem to have trusted him just because he talked fine, and looked a tip-top swell, and when there came an end to that, it was all up with him. I'm afraid he was a scamp. I'm prejudiced, perhaps, because him and his wife made so little of Jane and me, and he let me in, too, for more than I'd like to own to. But whatever he was, his daughter's "raal grit," as those Yankee fellows say. She could see through her father, and yet she loved him. He was kind in his way to her, I suppose. It seems a funny way to me—leaving a nice girl like her to get on as she can, when he might have left her comfortable. But Bella, mind, won't hear a word said against her father.'

The night before I had heard a good many words said against both father and daughter. I had called at Broad-streets, and found Mrs Phipps full of indignant complaint. Without consulting *her*, Phipps had engaged *that girl* to be governess to *their* children, because she would not come to them on any other terms; and a good thing it would have been if she had stayed away. What confidence could Mrs Phipps feel that her niece was competent, in any way, to take charge of her darling children? What did Phipps know about such things? And then, forsooth, the brougham must be sent to Paddington to meet her. If Phipps had been by himself, he would have taken a cab at the terminus, and why wasn't a cab good enough for Isabella? It would be putting absurd

ideas into the girl's head. 'Who was she, after all? Only a beggar's daughter they were going to pretend to employ out of charity.

These remarks Mrs Phipps made in her children's hearing. It may be supposed, therefore, that Isabella did not find very docile pupils. Before the servants also Mrs Phipps took a delight in humiliating her. The only friend she had in the house at first was her uncle, and his favour only increased her petty persecution during his absence, and moreover honest little Phipps was more hearty than delicate in his kindness. After a time her little cousins and the servants were compelled by her quiet force of character and gentle dignity to respect her, but that change made her aunt more anxious than ever to annoy her. Isabella's views on church matters were what is called 'rather high.' She did not think at any rate that going to church once on Sunday comprised almost the whole duty of an English Christian. No *was* Mrs Phipps's view, and, therefore, she sneered and scolded at Isabella's 'pharisaic fuss.' 'Getting up to take the Lord's Supper before breakfast—such popish nonsense!—and going about visiting all kinds of low people, just to get a chance of meeting the curate—and stitching away at coarse stuff that I'm ashamed to see in the house—I've no patience with such ways—it's disgraceful. We pay her a good salary—far more than she's worth—and she ought to give up all her time to the children.' With her usual good taste Mrs Phipps made these remarks to her husband before me.

Little Phipps was a very easy-going churchman. He had no sympathy with his niece's ecclesiastical proclivities, wondering why the poor girl could not sit down and enjoy herself when she had got a bit of time to herself, instead of 'rushing about,' as he phrased it, 'to worship saints and coddle sinners ;' but though his own theological notions were somewhat epicurean, he was fully tolerant to those who held a more duty-exacting creed. He and his niece had not become as intimate as he thought they would be when he rode in the mourning coach with her, but his respect for her had gone on increasing.

'My dear,' he said to his wife, 'does Bella neglect the children? I don't profess to understand such things, but Mrs Fisk told me that Jenny had got on wonderfully since Miss Bush left. And if she does her duty to the children, Bella has a right to spend her spare time as she likes. I wish, for my own sake, that she was a bit more sociable, for she's a nice girl to talk to, and it's pleasant to be played off to sleep by a girl like her ; but I won't have her interfered with. As to salary, Mrs Fisk was fishing to find out what we gave her, so I told Mrs Fisk to guess. Her lowest guess was just twice what we do give—so don't talk about good salary, Jane. It's a shame that she should go for so little, but she's so mighty independent she wouldn't take a penny more. I wanted to give her what Mrs Fisk said, but she wouldn't have it. She made out that it was only kindness, and that she wanted to earn her bread, and was very grateful to have a kind of home to earn it in. Poor girl, I'm

afraid it ain't much of a home to her. But as long as she'll stay in it, I shall be very glad. She's done the children's manners good already—I can see that, though I ain't a swell, and though they are mine. I won't have Bella interfered with—you understand, Jane.'

I am inclined to suspect that little Phipps did not speak quite so imperatively to his wife in private—but every one has his weakness. I am afraid, too, that his mode of taking Bella's part was not the one best calculated to influence his wife in the lonely girl's favour. It is scarcely fair, I think (unless you are a detective policeman), to scan the face of any one who imagines him or herself to be unseen by any fellow-creature: to do so seems to me almost as mean as to read an open letter that does not belong to you. Nathless, I must confess that one spring afternoon, when I was making my way towards the Broadpaks front-door, I was guilty of such meanness. It was a lovely afternoon; the air was soft; the sun shone brightly; there were only a few fleecy clouds to fleck the pure blue sky; the Highgate Road was so quiet that distant wheels could be heard almost as distinctly as in the country; the grass in the front gardens on both sides of the road, and in the white-railed roadside plats was freshly green; both inside and outside the garden fences horse-chestnut trees, lilacs, laburnums, and hawthorns, white and red, were in the glory of their blossom; the old-fashioned houses on the other side of the way looked out through their fresh creepers like cheerful old maids smiling at the youthful-

ness of their gay holiday ribbons. Everything I saw looked happy and hopeful except the face I spied as I drew near the window of the side-room in which Isabella taught her pupils. She was alone in it, standing with her hand on a chair, looking out into, but not *on*, the sunny verdure. The wearily-waiting expression of her eyes, the pinched look of her face—as if she had some chronic pain which it was very, very hard to bear in silence—I had ever and anon noticed before ; but on that bright afternoon, when she thought there was no one to see how sad she looked, she looked *so* sad, so prematurely old, that the green glory of the grass and leaves, the golden glory of the sunlight, the splendour of the blossoms, were as suddenly dimmed for me as if a black cloud had suddenly covered the blue sky. It was natural enough that the orphan girl, who earned her bread in the service of relatives—perhaps, however we may talk about ‘family affection,’ one of the most bitterly distasteful modes of earning bread—relatives of whom the only really kind one often, without meaning it, said and did things that wounded her—it was natural enough that Isabella, under such circumstances, should not have what is called ‘a flow of spirits ;’ but there was a far-off gaze in her sad eyes as she looked out on the green Highgate Road that sunny afternoon, which told me the sadness did not spring mainly from that place or time.

I learnt her secret afterwards, when it had ceased to be a secret.

About two years before her father’s death Isabella and

a fine young fellow who was staying at Cheltenham had become acquainted and mutually attached. He was no frivolous fop, but a Christian young man, in the best, the manliest sense of those often-sneeringly-used words. (A good many young men, though, I have noticed, who profess to consider Christianity equivalent to milkson-pishness in a contemporary, are inferior, even according to their own standard of manliness, to the young men on whom they would fain be supposed to look down.) This young fellow—Ernest Wray, let us call him—was a Haileybury man, spending a few good-bye weeks with friends who were then living at Cheltenham, before he sailed for India. It was understood when they parted that Isabella was to go out to be married a year or two after his settlement there. The vessel in which Wray had taken his passage by the round-the-Cape route sailed; the arrival of the *Hooghly* in the Hooghly was duly reported in England; but Isabella heard nothing from, or of, her lover. She did not distrust him, but her father did. He made inquiries of the owners and agents of the ship in which Wray was supposed to have sailed, and found that he *had* sailed in her. When the *Hooghly* got back into the Thames, the father made inquiries of the captain, and found that Wray had mysteriously disappeared at Cape Town. He had gone ashore there, for the last time, the day before the *Hooghly* weighed anchor, saying that he meant to hire a horse and ride over to the Constantia vineyards; and, after that, the skipper had never seen him again. 'I couldn't wait for one passen-

ger,' the mahogany-faced old tar added; 'but I was uncommon sorry to sail without him. He was a real good fellow, and as game as he was good. We pretty nigh ran ashore on Dassen Island, and he kept the women-folk and the menfolk too, for that matter, quiet just by *keeping* quiet, and looking cheery. It was a near squeak. When we got her head round, you could almost have flipped a biscuit into the breakers. He was game and he was good, and no mistake, was Mr Wray. We'd nasty weather off the Medcories, and a man went overboard, off the main to'sail yard. Wray saw him, and offed with his jacket, and overboard he went after him; and he grabbed him, too, and held him up till we got a boat out and saved the both of 'em. Everybody liked Mr Wray. I'd some o' them cheeky young Addiscombe cadets aboard, and at first they used to turn up their noses, and pull comical long faces—behind his back, though—at Mr Wray, because he was religious. But before we got to the Cape, the Addiscombe chaps liked him pretty nigh as well as anybody. He didn't mind what he did for anybody, and you could see that there was no humbug in him—what he meant he said—he wasn't half-ashamed of his religion, like some of the pious folks I've taken out—and his religion hadn't any reason to be ashamed of him; and that's more than some religious folks I've taken out could say—fussing and snarling, and scared as if there was no God and no Christ. I was uncommon sorry to have to sail without Mr Wray, but there was no help for it.'

That was the story Dr. Bradley brought home to his daughter, and she had most literally learnt it by heart. When months went by, and still neither they nor the few relatives—distant relatives—whom Wray had in England (his near connections were all dead) had been able to get tidings, from any quarter, of the young man, the Doctor made up his mind that Wray was dead. It was certain that he had not entered on his duties in India, and, the Doctor reasoned, it was not likely that a man would throw up a career just to free himself from an engagement of which he had repented, when there were so many less costly modes of extricating himself. Isabella had never doubted her lover's honour, and she strove hard to continue firm also to her belief in his being still alive; but as months of utterly silent absence lengthened into years, the task of keeping up both her faith and her spirits grew very hard indeed.

She had been at her uncle's three or four years, when Phipps meeting me in the City, exclaimed very merrily (I was then unmarried)—

‘It's all up with you, old fellow; you've lost your chance.’

‘What d'you mean? Lost my chance? How, when, and where?’

‘Why, at Broadoaks, with Bella. It's no use denyin' you were sweet upon her. But if you ever *had* a chance, you've lost it now. Only think—the sly puss has had a young man all the time, had him this I don't know how long, and we to know nothing about it! Her aunt ain't

best pleased, but I'm jolly glad for my part to see poor Bella looking happy at last. He seems a real fine young fellow, though he's a fierce un to look at—any rate, he *was*. When the first of the crying and kissing was over, Bella had to send him out to get his hair cut. The children looked at him as if they were afraid he'd bite. It's a queer story theirs.'

Phipps then told me as much of the story as I have already related, and the sequel which I am about to relate. Perhaps it may seem rather 'romantic,' but I cannot help that. *Tant mieux*, rather than *tant pis pour les faits*. Writers of fiction have to guard against anything at all out of the common way for fear the critics should denounce it as 'a glaring improbability,' or 'flat impossibility;' but when one is recording facts, all that one has to do is to write them down as they occurred.

When the *Hooghly* sailed between Robben Island and the lion-like hill that couches sentry over Table Bay, Wray was lying insensible at Wynberg. He had been thrown from his horse on his ride back from Constantia, been picked up and carried into their master's house by the kerchief-turbaned black women who had been lounging, laughing, against the white gabled walls; and in the old Dutch farmhouse the Dutch farmer's wife nursed him conscientiously, but somewhat grudgingly, until he was able to move on to Cape Town. The *Hooghly* had been gone a fortnight and more, taking with her almost the whole of his cash and all his credentials. How was he to get anyone, in a place in which he did not know a

soul, to lend him money*to carry him on to India? There was an Indiaman, however, bound for Calcutta lying in the bay, and he applied to the captain for a passage. Without the corroborative evidence of his familiarity with Indian matters, the captain would have believed his story. Again Wray started for the field in which ~~he~~ was looking forward to honest work, which might bring him fame and fortune. That would be all the sweeter because shared by a loving wife, who was expected, however, to*arrive long before the fame and fortune. But Wray's second ship was lost on the Madagascar coast, and he, a cuddy servant, the boat-swain's mate, and three foremast-men, were the only ones of the ship's company who got to shore alive. Wray brought one of his fellow-passengers ashore with him—a young girl, who was going out to be married; but the wind and the sea and the rocks had beaten and ground the life out of her when he dragged her up upon ~~the~~ beach—himself scarcely more than a drenched bundle of rags, and bruised, bleeding, broken flesh and bones. Even of this scanty remnant of a ship's company, the waiting natives, who were of a very savage tribe that had no intercourse with Europeans, killed all except Wray, the cuddy-servant, and one of the sailors, as soon as they got ashore. These three, for some inscrutable reason, were reserved as slaves. The cuddy-servant soon died, but Wray and the sailor, for months, for years, had been the blacks' sometimes petted, but most frequently brutally treated, drudges. At last, however, they had

managed to make their escape, and after hungry and weary wanderings through broad belts of wood, and perilous crossings of wide streams, they had struck the coast again a good many miles farther south, at a bay in which a trading-brig was lying. In this they had got shelter, succour, and a passage to Cape Town. There the sailor had shipped in a New York vessel, and Wray had got a passage to London. At his London agent's he had learnt where Bella was living, and that she still wrote ever and anon a sad little note to inquire whether anything had been heard of him. He had instantly rushed off to Broadoaks, and what happened when he arrived there it is unnecessary to detail. 'Jane says,' added Phipps, in conclusion, 'that he ought to have gone to the barber's, and the tailor's, and the bootmaker's, and I don't know where all first—that it was a shame to come to a house like ours looking such a brown, hairy ruffian; but I don't think that was Bella's opinion. It won't be long before those two are one. Wray says they've been engaged quite long enough, and I should be of the same mind if I was in his place. Of course, they'll be married from ours. I'm to give her away. You may come, if you'll promise to be good. Mind you *don't* come, though, if you ain't quite sure that your spirits will be equal to the occasion. I shouldn't like to have Bella annoyed by your giving way to your feeling, and breaking down, and blubberin'! I hate wet weddings. You'll see that Bella won't cry. Why should she? If a girl wants to have a fellow, why on earth does she begin to blubber the very

minute she's got him for certain? That's what I can't make out. But there, I mustn't talk about Bella not crying to *you*, or *you'll* begin to cry now. To ease your mind, though, I can tell you that you wouldn't have had a shadow of a chance if this young fellow hadn't turned up.'

Bachelors, of course, are fair game for Benedicks ; and honest little Phipps's banter, as will have been seen, was not of a caustically sarcastic character. I certainly had a great liking for Isabella, but as she and Phipps were well aware, it was a fatherly kind of liking.

I went to the wedding, and when I saw Bella's happy face as she went out of the church, leaning on the arm of the 'brown, hairy ruffian,' with the merry bells pealing overhead, when I saw her as she drove off with him from Broadoaks along the green Highgate Road, I thought that I would gladly have travelled five hundred miles instead of five to witness the joy and *peace* that had smoothed out the premature lines of that again young-looking face.

They left us on a spring afternoon which, except that both the hour and the season were rather earlier, was very much such another as that on which I had seen her looking out of the side window.

Just before she went I had been congratulating her on her happiness, and wondering how, on the whole, she had kept up her heart so bravely for so long. 'I *am* happy—*so* happy!' she answered with simple earnestness ; and then she added—superstitiously or religiously,

according to my reader's pleasure—'and I kept up my heart, because God never let me quite lose my hope, up to the last. When I said my prayers about it, I never felt as if it was no use saying them, and so—though it *was* hard sometimes—I kept on believing that the good, true God would let us see one another sometime, soon or late.'

That was Isabella's paraphrase of the epigrammatic dogma, 'Our prayers are prophets.'

XVI.

A HORNSEY HISTORY.

IN the days when cheap builders and land societies had not invaded Hornsey—when there was not a raw-looking new brick to be seen in the place, and the walls and palings of the grounds around its ripe, drowsy old houses, that somehow made one think of ‘sleepy pears,’ bore mosses and lichens, instead of long rows of vertical white-paint lines, with ‘Lot 1,’—‘Lot Ever-so-many’ in white-paint characters between—in those days, not so far off, after all, Hornsey was as pretty, and almost as quietly rural a village as could be found anywhere, even in England—and that is saying a good deal. When I wanted to get a little country peace I used to take lodgings for a week at Hornsey, and felt as far off from London there as if I had gone to some Thorpe or Stoke a hundred miles away—except that I enjoyed postal and other conveniences that I certainly should not have had at the Thorpe or Stoke.

It was whilst I was thus rustivating within sight of St. Paul's (*literally* within sight of it, whenever I chose to take a few minutes' walk up a country lane, with hedges and elms and meadows on both sides, and an old-fashioned little white farm-house, with cows and broodbacked cart-horses, and sliced haystacks and a duck-pond, on one side) that I fell in with little Frank Phillips.

I had walked through the meadow lying between the bow-windowed 'Compasses' and the church, whose old tower is almost hidden from top to bottom in ivy, and was leaning on the white gate that gives on the churchyard, watching a little cluster of children weaving daisy chains as they sat upon the churchyard grass, leaning back against the sunny graves as if they were lolling on sofas. Now they laughed merrily, and anon they were laying down the law of daisy making with more than judicial gravity. This little group was watched very curiously by a chubby, blue-eyed, four-year-old boy with a shock of curly, golden-brown hair, standing beside a kind-faced young lady, who was seated on the cracked, broad, sloping grey-and-black top of an old tomb, that looked as if it were being quietly drawn into the ground by the ivy that had grown round its sides. Presently the little fellow left his companion, and ran up to the children, but he did not say a word to them, and they did not say a word to him. He stared at them, and they stared at him, in the sympathetic shyness, the sociable unsociability, which is common with little children, at first, when they are thrown into contact with strangers of

their own age. The curly-headed little fellow got tired of the mutually-silent staring first, and trotted up to inspect me. Having taken a preliminary view from a distance, he came nearer, and again scanned me, with his head on one side like a bird's, and without saying a word. His tongue, however, like a ghost's, was loosened as soon as I spoke to him. We were soon deep in conversation, in the course of which he informed me that his name was Franky—Franky Phillips—papa's name was Phillips—and papa's name was Franky too—papa didn't live anywhere now—papa had gone to heaven—poor papa was dead—papa used to write books—no, *he* wouldn't like to write books—he should like to run about till he was big enough to be a soldier—it wasn't fun to sit on a chair all day, writing—yes, papa played with him sometimes, but papa got tired so soon—dear manima was the one to play with—he hadn't any brothers and sisters now—he'd had some—mamma said, before he was born—they were gone to heaven too—no, *he* wouldn't like to go to heaven, for a long time yet, he wanted to run about—only old people that couldn't see to thread their needles ought to go to heaven—Nurse Watson had gone to heaven, and *she* couldn't thread her needle—dear manima was at home in Park Road—dear mamma couldn't run about with him now, because dear mamma was very ill—Miss Saville took him out now—that was Miss Saville, sitting over there—Miss Saville often came to see dear mamma—Miss Saville was very kind to dear mamma, and so she ought to be—it was Miss Saville who said so, be-

cause dear mamma was very kind to her when they went to school together—yes, he was very fond of Miss Saville and meant to have her for his wife as soon as ever he was big enough to be a soldier.

Just then Miss Saville came up to claim her little obarge, and Master Franky introduced me to her, and through her I afterwards became acquainted with Mrs Phillips.

The invalid had humble but clean and quiet lodgings in one of the little houses in the Park Road. The bedroom, in which she was almost bed-ridden, was very small, but its latticed window had an outside curtain of canary-plant, and looked out, first, on a tiny front-garden, gay with flowers, and, beyond the road, on the green, wooded, gently undulating country stretching away to Tottenham. The people of the house were decent folks, anxious to do the best they could for 'their sick lady,' as they always called her, and though she lacked many things which wealthier invalids would have had, it was a kind of relief to think that she had found, on the whole, so peaceful a corner to die in. Miss Saville was exceedingly kind to her dying friend, but Miss Saville was only rich *in* kindness, and Mrs Phillips's, moreover, was one of those cases in which a fear of wounding the feelings of the sufferer restrains those who are wealthy from offering what I may call material aid, however shrewdly its need may be guessed at. Not that Mrs Phillips had many wealthy friends, or friends of any kind. She had once had a good many

friends, but when I made her acquaintance the only person who took an active interest in her welfare was Miss Saville. When Mrs Phillips was a 'big girl' and Miss Saville was a 'little girl' at school, the former had been the latter's idealised idol, and the latter had been the former's 'darling little pet.' The mutual attachment had lasted in after-years, although, of course, it had lost some of its romance and inequality. It was the little girl now who could help the big girl, although Miss Saville, too, had known reverses. When the news reached her that her friend was in the Hornsey cottage with her fatherless, last little boy, Miss Saville was helping her mother to keep a preparatory school for little boys, in Barnsbury. She had instantly started for Hornsey, and many a time she had been there since, always bringing some of those little luxuries which *can* be given to sensitive invalids, at small cost to their rich friends, but which seriously dip into the pockets of the thoughtful poor friends who more generally bring them.

Besides spending more money than, I fear, she could afford, Miss Saville sacrificed all her week-day holidays and some of her Sundays to her friend. To spend a Sunday beside Mrs Phillips's bed could scarcely, however, be called a sacrifice. She was so patient under paroxysms of pain, and—a far rarer virtue—so free from irritability during the long, dreary reaches of prostrate languor which were one of the symptoms of her complaint; she was so quietly, unwaveringly confident in her trust in God's fatherliness, assured to her by her

woman's worship of His Son—no man, however saintly, I think, ever worshipped Jesus Christ as even otherwise commonplace Christian women do—that it must have been a daylong service and sermon—a daylong service and sermon that could not weary, because the whole *was* genuine—to spend a Sunday with her.

That Mrs Phillips *was* dying, would very soon be dead, I believed as soon as Miss Saville took me into her room. The sick woman was, I suppose, about thirty-four or thirty-five, but illness had so aged her face that, had it not been for her cascade of hair, you might have thought that she was the grandmother of her little boy, who was anxiously looking into her face, and trying to 'make mamma wake up,' by pulling at her sickness-dimmed, light-brown hair, which contrasted so pathetically with his own golden-brown, vigorous-looking curls.

From the, always charitably-affectionate, very little which Mrs Phillips had the power or will to tell me, the frank prattle of little Franky, and the more consecutive accounts of thoroughly kind, though, so far as poor dead Phillips was concerned, *rather* uncharitable, Miss Saville, I guessed at Mrs Phillips's history in this way :—

She was, I thought, a naturally high-spirited, beautiful girl, who might easily have got a far better husband, in the 'society' sense, than poor Phillips. But they had met, and Nature had made them, in her inscrutable way, feel that each was just the other needed for, the com-

plement of a united existence. Phillips, so far as I could make out, was a lazily good-hearted fellow, anxiously careful not to give anybody pain, and wishful to give anybody pleasure, so long as the pleasure-giving did not involve much trouble to himself; capable, when he got excited, of confronting danger, and putting himself to inconvenience, with a piquant relish for the danger and inconvenience, for anybody he loved. But, on the whole, I fancy, he must have been a selfishly easy-going man. He had knocked about the world, liked and laughed at, and, at last, had drifted into the 'literary line'—that queerly miscellaneous profession—in London. He had literary tastes, some talent, and some amount of writing 'knack.' He found that he could make a living, of the feast-and-fast kind, in London, by writing. He relished the so-called 'Bohemian' life which, often hard-up, sometimes flush, bachelor scribblers in London lead; and so he drifted into writing for his dinner. He was pleased, of course, when his work was praised, but so long as censure did not affect his pay, he did not grieve greatly when his work was blamed. He had no real literary 'vocation'—he was not, and he knew that he was not, meant to be a writer. He wrote for the satisfaction, or otherwise, of the public, simply because he had discovered that he had a knack of writing, and had not a knack for anything else. But he sometimes strayed out of Bohemia, and fell in love, and was mysteriously lucky enough to marry a beautiful, noble-hearted wife, against the wishes

of her 'prudent' friends, who still believed in 'Grub Street' destitution.

When he had got a wife—when he had got children—he discovered, however, that feast-and-fast work was 'not so nice,' as the young ladies say. Even an easy-going selfish man of a 'Bohemian' turn, may be able to extract some amusement from the fact that he has ever and anon to go on short commons, and house in queer quarters, so long as he has only himself to look after; but unless he be that monster—a monster in which I do not believe, since I have never come across it yet, even amongst very selfish people—unless he be that utter monster, an utterly selfish man, he cannot help feeling miserable when he finds that his wife, who has sacrificed her comfort to her love, and his children, who had no voice in the matter, and who look upon him as a demigod, have to suffer privation because the *limp houseband* cannot bind the house.

Phillips was a man who was often ill, and when not ill in any easily definable sense, he was often not up to work,—felt, as he might have phrased it himself, 'as if all the go was knocked out of him.'

Under such circumstances it may be readily supposed that his home was not a luxurious one—that it was often the reverse of luxurious. Poor Mrs Phillips's married life—the greater part of it, at any rate—had been a series of struggles to 'keep things together,' 'to make both ends meet:' struggles which are none the less painful in the aggregate, because they may seem so petty individually.

Little of the secure shelter, the daily peace, the sunny holidays of happy married life had she ever known. Her children too had died like blighted buds. Only little Franky was left to her, when poor Phillips, with very little more to leave her, died at Boulogne.

She had come back to London by the steamer with her little boy, and take lodgings there whilst she tried to obtain employment. But her health gave way in the confined two rooms she had in one of the dreary side streets that branch out of the dingy City Road. Her doctor, who visited her gratuitously, because he had had a kind of semi-contemptuously compassionate liking for her dead husband, and had a sincere regard and respect for her, told her that it was absolutely necessary for her to remove into more country-like air, and recommended Hornsey. There she took two little cottage rooms in Park Road, but it was not long before she only needed one of them, so far as she was concerned. She was almost constantly confined to her bed, spending on it, all alone, long hours of weariness and anguish—sometimes all night long. Her friend the doctor looked in upon her occasionally, the benevolent clergy of the parish, of course, did not neglect her, her kind Barnsbury friend came over to see her as often as she possibly could, the good woman of the house was willing to do anything *she* could for 'her sick lady ;' but still the invalid was necessarily left a good deal to herself.

Little Franky's cot had been removed into the other room, and though, besides his regular 'good-morning'

and 'good-night' visits, the little fellow would every now and then run in and climb upon her patchwork quilt, to kiss her and pat her thin cheek, and play with her soft, once-sheeny hair, she did not like to keep the child long out of the fresh air, and fond as he was of his mamma, he soon grew restless in her room and fidgeted to escape from it. But Mrs Phillips never repined ; a peace that was hopeful in spite of its pensiveness—autumn light with autumn flowers, promising spring flowers, in it—was the atmosphere of her spirit. She remembered God upon her bed, and meditated and communed with Him in what would otherwise have been her drearily long night-watches ; and so her heart was kept in peace. Little Franky was the only tie that bound her closely to the earth, and that being loosened by her Barnsbury friend's promise to take care of the little fellow, she could feel that for her to die would be gain. She was care-wearied, her thirst for love had not been slaked on earth, and she longed for the everlasting shelter, the love that can never flag or disappear.

She died at the quietest, most sunnily calm period of a mid-autumn afternoon. Only her friend and her little boy were with her. Her friend was sitting by her bed, and her little boy upon it. She had given him a kiss every now and then when he put down his chubby little cheek to her lips, and had answered his prattle with a faint, fond, sweet smile—she was too weak to talk. Presently, still holding Franky's hand, she turned her head upon the pillow, and Miss Saville holding up her finger

and whispering 'Hush !' Franky sat quite still for two or three minutes. Then he started as if frightened, and leaned over and touched his mother's face, and then with tears brimming in his eyes, he faltered, ' Oh, Miss Saville, mamma's gone so sound asleep !'

A minute afterwards Miss Saville, shaking with sobs herself, was clutching orphan little Franky to her breast, and saying between her sobs, ' Don't cry like—that—my darling pet—dear mamma—has gone to heaven !'

XVII.

PUNCH AT HOME.



PARSLEY SMILES would have been puzzled to tell who gave him that name—either ‘Christian’ or surname. He was a ‘promiscuous’ acquaintance of mine—a Punch-and-Judy man, whose first memory was of eating damp haws in a foggy ditch, and who often afterwards had not even haws to eat, but who, when I knew him, managed to support a wife and two children. His surname and his calling may suggest the idea of a rollickingly-merry man, but Parsley Smiles was nothing of the kind. Why he was called Parsley it is impossible to guess, but I think he must have been called Smiles in irony. Parsley very seldom smiled when I knew him, and looked as if he had very seldom smiled before I knew him. He was not a morose man, but it was accident, not choice, that had made a Punch-and-Judy man of him. When he had his ‘call’ in his mouth, and was speaking out the parts

for his puppets, I have no^o doubt that he felt, as well as looked, as grave as a judge. At any rate, when his partner took his place inside the green-baize-curtained frame, and Parsley banged away at the big drum, blew down into the pandean pipes, addressed Mr Punch and his audience with stereotyped banter, and carried round the saucer for coppers, there was not the slightest trace of fun in his face. I do not mean that it was *kept* grave, to heighten the effect of his jokes: it *was* grave—there was no sly twinkle in the eyes. It was this incongruity between the man and his calling that made me curious to learn something about him. I had met him at various times in different parts of London, and every time he had the same care-worn, not sullen, but most unhilarious face. One evening when it had grown too dark for Punch performances *al fresco*, I saw him toiling homewards with the slanted frame on his shoulders, and the puppet-box slung behind him; his partner, still bearded with the Pan's-pipes, and bearing the big drum, plodding a little before him. I followed the two men across Trafalgar Square, up St. Martin's Lane and St. Andrew Street, whence they turned into a side street, and disappeared up a dingy flight of stairs. I had not time then to do more than note the name of the street and the number of the house; but about a week afterwards, when I had a leisure evening, I went to the house, and inquired of some dirty little youngsters who were squatting on the doorstep of the open door, on which floor I could find the Punch-and-Judy men. 'Which on 'em?' answered

the biggest of the children. 'Punchy Guts lives second-floor front, and Punchy Parsley first-floor back.'

'What kind of man is Punchy Guts, my little man?' I asked with a smile.

'He's a fat cove,' the little boy answered with a return grin, 'that's allus a-grubbin when he ain't a-laughin', an' allus a-laughin' when he ain't a-grubbin'.'

'Oh, then, I think it is Punchy Parsley that I want to see.'

I mounted to the first floor. The door of the back room was open wide enough to enable me to see what was going on inside. The punch-frame stood against the wall by the window; Toby, with his frill still on, crouching at its foot; a little boy with the drumsticks in his hands was lolling on the big drum; a pretty little girl, with her hair over her forehead and the Pan's-pipes in her hands, was looking sidelong at her tired-out father, who must have taken off his coat, and gone to sleep, upon the only bed I saw, almost as soon, I guessed, as he had got home. The youngsters had wanted to 'play at father,' but their mother was hushing them that they might not wake him. When she saw me she came forward to learn my business. I was telling her that I had come to have a talk with her husband, but that since he was asleep, I would call again when he awoke. I found him willing enough to talk, and partly then and partly at other times when I called upon him, I learnt his history.

He knew nothing of his father and mother. His earliest memory, as I have said, was a meal of damp

haws in a foggy ditch. At that time Parsley belonged, as he phrased it, to a travelling acrobat. Parsley was under the impression that this man had literally bought him. His master, Briggs by name, treated him very brutally, often thrashing and half-starving him, if at all slow in learning his business, or if there were but few coppers in the saucer, which Parsley had to carry round. Briggs's mates sometimes took Parsley's part, but not very often. Some of them were no better tempered than Briggs, and those who were good-natured were shy of interfering with him, since he was a very powerful, violent-tempered man. Getting nothing but his clothes and food—and often very little of that—Parsley lived with this Briggs until he was about fourteen. (As he did not know when he was born, of course, he could only guess his age.) Sometimes engaged at circuses, and sometimes travelling the country as members of a 'school,' they had in that time not only gone over a good part of the United Kingdom, but also visited the Continent. The posturers' 'school' was the only school to which his master put Parsley, but one of Briggs's mates had taught the boy to read and write after a fashion. One Barnet fair, the day of the pleasure-fair was soakingly wet, and Briggs's 'school' took scarcely a penny. Thereupon he got mad-drunk, and gave Parsley so terrible a drubbing that he could stand his master's brutality no longer. As soon as he had exchanged his gaudy tumbler's uniform for the shabby suit which was his only mufti, he ran away to London. He knew London pretty well, and for

a few days begged enough money to provide him with food and pay for a bed in a low lodging-house. But Parsley did not relish begging. He wanted to *do* something for his living. One morning, as soon as he had had his breakfast, he went out, determined to apply at every shop in which he saw a bill announcing 'A boy wanted.' But nobody would employ him. Some people said he was too shabby, and others ordered him off as soon as they discovered that he could give no reference. He had just come out of a trunk-maker's shop in the Strand, disappointed for the twentieth time, when he ran against one of the men belonging to Briggs's 'school.' 'You needn't frighten yourself,' said the man. 'The Tartar's kicked the bucket. He got run over coming away from Barnet that night. So you can come back now, and you shall have your fair whack of what we takes, Parsley.'

But Parsley was sick of tumbling, and asked his former comrade whether he could not put him up to some other way of earning money. The man answered that Dark Davy wanted a sharp boy that he could trust, and that if Parsley liked to try for the place, he should have a good word from *him*. This Dark Davy was an old blind man, who was wheeled about in a kind of Bath-chair, playing the drum and Pan's-pipes. His retinue generally consisted of a woman to push, and a boy to pull, and carry round the hat. The boy passed for the old man's grandson; the woman, according to her age, as his wife or daughter. His 'relations' frequently robbed Dark Davy; at any rate, he fancied that

they did, although he kept and paid them well out of his very considerable receipts. Parsley became Dark Davy's 'grandson,' and continued so to be until he was seventeen, meanwhile learning to play the drum and pipes. Then Parsley caught the small-pox, and very nearly died in hospital.

When he came out, he went to a street-showmen's 'house-of-call' in the Seven Dials neighbourhood, and fell in with a Punch-and-Judy man who was in want of what Parsley called a 'pardner.' His musical attainments were just the ones required; the other man taught him the outside patter, and Parsley was taken into partnership. At first, he was to have only a quarter of the receipts, which was to be increased to a third when he had mastered the mystery of the 'call' and got up the parts of the puppets, so that he could take his turn inside the frame. That and all the properties belonging to the senior partner, he was to have the remaining two-thirds. But Parsley had saved his life at the risk of his own, when the frame with the 'pardner' inside had been upset by a runaway horse-and-cart, and after that, although Parsley confessed that he was not nearly so efficient as his friend either inside or outside the green baize, the 'pardner' insisted on Parsley sharing their earnings equally with him. Two or three years afterwards the 'pardner' died, leaving all his little property to Parsley. Parsley then had to seek a partner, and got, almost as soon as he got him, a partner for life. His partner in trade had a sister whom Parsley married

—a hard-working, good-principled woman, who made him an excellent wife. She was very fond of him, and very fond of their two children, and looked after the souls as well as the bodies of all three to the best of her ability. Parsley was not a depraved man ; he was, considering his circumstances and antecedents, I should say, an exceptionally well-behaved man when he married ; but so far as knowledge of Christianity went he was a heathen then. Mrs Smiles was not a very enlightened Christian, but she was a sincere believer in Christ, and gave a Christian atmosphere to their little home. She read a psalm and a collect night and morning to the little family ; she got Parsley to go to church with her on Sunday evenings, first fitfully, but at last regularly ; she did not drink, brawl, dawdle, and gossip, like a good many of her neighbours, and little Punch and Judy, as the neighbours called the two young Smileses, were very different from most of her neighbours' saucy, foul-tongued children. They honoured and loved their parents, although both, perhaps, in different ways, were a little too grave for children's tastes.

‘ Yes, I’ve seen father play Punch,’ said little Fanny Smiles to me one day. ‘ Me and Tom had gone a arrand for mother, and we see our frame, and father’s pardner playing the drum in Golding Square. So we stopped and heard father do it, but father ain’t funny like that when he comes home. He’s so tired ; he has his supper, and he goes to bed. Yes, sir, he’s very good to us, but he don’t want to make us laugh. He’s too

tired. *Tom's* a funny chap.⁸ He's got father's old call, and he can do a'most the whole of the talk now, and he can play the drum and pipes, and so can I. Tom says he'll be a Punchy, but mother don't want him to be, nor father neither. Tom's going for a arrand-boy next Monday, and I'm to go and nuss a baby soon's ever I'm eight. Tom and me goes to school in the eveninks, and of a Sunday afternoon. We runs arrands for mother now, but we're gettin' too growed-up not to do something that'll bring in money. Tom 'll be nine next birthday. Mother, she makes little boys' trousers when she can get 'em to make, and father he works hard at bein' a Punchy all day long; he can scarce get up the stairs sometimes when he comes home, he's ~~that~~ tired. Father's pardner has to help him up often. Uncle Jack used to be father's pardner, but Uncle Jack's gone to Californy.'

So far as I could judge, Parsley was a sober, domestic man, and, therefore, having heard or read of Punch-and-Judymen living on the fat of the land, I was rather puzzled by Parsley's meagre style of living. I said to him one day that I had understood that members of his profession—Parsley liked to have Punch-and Judy spoken of as a profession—made handsome incomes.

'And so they used to make 'em,' answered Parsley. 'My fust pardner's told me that when he iust went into the line, he's shared his ten pound a day with *his* pardner, and they've gone home and had their game and their wine like swells. But thinks as is, and thinks as was, is

wery different. We used to 'git horders horfen when I fust went into it. I've played in a real live nobleman's drorin'-room more than once ; but that's goin' out now ; Punch ain't appreciated as he used to was ; it's three year now since I got my last horder for a Christmas party ; and money's got so scarce that the streets ain't worth 'alf a quarter what they used to was. A long pitch ain't worth much more than a short pitch now. Anyhow, I think I do uncommon well now if me and my pardner shares a bull a day between us. He can git on, because he's only his own belly to look to, but 'alf a bull a day—and five times out of six it ain't nigh as much as that—ain't much for a cove as 'as got a wife and kids. If my wife warn't the good old gal she is, we should horfen find ourselves in a corner. Tain't much she arns, but it's horfen more than what I brings 'ome, and she's got the knack of makin' a little go a long way. She's a good old gal, is my wife. She's religious, you see, sir. I ain't religious, I'm sorry to say, but I wish I was. Religious folk seem somehow to make theirselves contented hows'ever thinks is goin'. Them dear little kids of mine think a deal more of she than they do of me. I love 'em, and they love me ; but it's her they look up to somehow. No, sir, I don't mean to bring up Tom to my business. He wants to be a Punchy, but his mother don't want him to be, and I don't want him neither. There's temptations, and the boys is horfen wery owda-cious—pinches ye through the baize, and makes holes and pokes ye, and pitches their caps right into the

frame, and hunts ye about and chaffs ye, and never pays ye nuffink. It ain't a jolly life now, the Punch line ain't. I should be glad to be out of it, if I could git 'old of somefink else that I could git as much by ; but I've got into the way of it, and don't see my way clear to nuffink else I could do as well on, though it is so bad. My wife's troubled in her mind because she thinks it's wicked somehow, but I can't quite see that. Of course it ain't right that a party should fling a baby out o' winder, and fight his wife, and swear, and so on ; but then, you see, it's all make-believe, and my fust pardner used to say that there was a fine moral in it, because Punch, big scamp as he was, licked the devil after all ; that was his joke. But I ain't a funny man, and I don't relish arnin' my bread, sich as 'tis, by makin' a fool of myself. I go to church of a evenink now with my old gal and the kids, and when they're a singin' that there Evenink Hymn, I think o' myself squeakin' out *roo-too-roo-too-roo-too-roo-too-roo-too-roo-ery* ; and somehow they don't tally. I'll be wery grateful to you, sir, and so'll my old gal, if you'll put me in the way of gittin' my livin' somehow else, more respectable to a man's feelinks, and his wife's about him. Hopen air I've al'ays been used to, but anythink reg'lar you could git me I'd be thankful for, sir. Punch used to be good pay, but it ain't now ; and when a cove's got wife and kids, and hain't got no nateral fun in him, he don't relish, somehow, arnin' his bread—and precious little of it—by squeakin'.

XVIII.

PUNCHY PARSLEY'S ORIENTAL FRIEND.



ON a dreary winter's day, when dirty low-hanging snow-clouds had blotted out every inch of blue sky, and even the 'red billiard ball' which for half an hour in the forenoon had done duty as sun—dirty snow-clouds that blended with dirty frost-fog, like yellowish-brown stalactites coalescing with yellowish-brown stalagmites—I happened to be crossing a piece of waste ground in the Middlesex Bromley. On one side was a patch of bony-stalked snow-wigged cabbages—the gapped hedge that enclosed them was almost obliterated by the snow. On the other side was a snow-furred and sheeted huddle of 'builders' materials'—planks, piles, scaffold-poles, unglazed window-sashes, a snow-thatched weather-board summer-

house, and a reading-desk with a snowdrift in it like a dropped surplice, and snow overflowing its sconces like guttering candles. The hummocky waste, without its snowy covering, would have stood declared a dismal pitch where rubbish might be shot, and, in spite of the snow, crownless hats, old boots and shoes, and crumpled rusty colanders here and there asserted themselves. On the birchbroom-like bristles of two old snow-patched pollard poplars sat half-a-dozen black sparrows, almost as motionless as if they had been carved out of coal. Not a twig moved a hair's-breadth. There was an oppressive silence in the air—as if all life were getting frozen up with treacherously quiet rapidity. It was a relief when the gun of some prowler after small birds was fired, and the echoes turned the report into a volley of musketry. When the echoes had died away, it was pleasant to hear the rumble of boys sliding somewhere in the waste. Whereabouts I could not at first make out ; but presently I saw two lines of black dots rapidly crossing on a distant snowy background. These were the caps of boys careering along the up and down slides they had cut out on a stagnant pool that had frozen in a hollow in the waste. When I reached it I was rather astonished to find Tom, Punchy Parsley's son, amongst the sliders.

'Why, Tom,' I said, 'what brings you here?'

'We live in Lime'us now, sir,' Tom answered, in a hurry. 'Three Colt Street. Father's got a boat, and we should both ha' been out in her to-day, only the ice

give her a jam yesterday. Father's a purlman now, and I helps him. It's better fun than bein' a Punchy."

I had only time to get from his son the number of the house in which Parsley Smiles lived, and then, in obedience to impatient cries of 'Now then, sleepy-head, keep the pot a-bilin'!' Master Tom went down the slide in grand style—now squatting on his heels, now poised upon one foot, and anon giving the 'postman's knock,' with an adroitness and a vigour which showed he was only called 'sleepy-head' in complimentary irony.

I was bound for the Commercial Road when I fell in with Tom, and my curiosity being excited as to Punchy Parsley's new mode of life, I found my way to Three Colt Street as soon as I had finished my business in the broad thoroughfare hard by.

Punchy Parsley and his wife were both at home, busy in different ways, but little Fanny, I was told, was at school, where I was further informed, she was 'getting on famous.' I guessed, therefore, that my friend Smiles had bettered himself by his change of occupation.

'Why isn't Tom at school too, Mr Smiles?' I asked, when I had told him how it was that I had found him out.

'Oh, sir, you mustn't think that Tom's idling away his time,' his mother answered. 'Tom's a good boy, and what his father and me can teach him he learns willin', and he goes to school, too, at odd times. But he's helpin' his father now in the boat, and a good boy he is, his father says. So as father can't go out to-day,

because the boat's mendin', we've let Tom have a run just to stretch his legs. I've no fears of his gettin' into bad company. There can't be harm in a 'boy's having a slide, can there, sir? Why our curate—and a good young man he is, in the ways of wisitin' and preachin', both—our curate gets up almost afore daylight, and off he goes to Wictorier Park to have a skate. Says he to me—he's fond of his joke, though he is such a good young man—says he to me, 'Mrs Smiles,' says he, 'I ain't a-losin' any time, for if I was to go wisitin' instead o' skatin', half o' my people would be abed and asleep, and t'other half would be cross because I'd come before they'd got their hair out o' paper.' That's what our curate says, sir, and a blessed young man he is in times o' trouble, and at all times, though he is so fond of his joke.'

Mrs Smiles was one of those worthy but somewhat weariful women who think it necessary to apologise for every bit of fun, however slight—and certainly her curate's facetiousness was of the very mildest—just as if God grudged, and might probably punish, every laugh uttered in a world which he has made so full of things and persons to laugh, as well as weep, at and with.

'But what do *you* know about boats, Mr Smiles? What put it into your head to get a living on the river? What is it that you do?' I inquired of the ex-Punchy. Parsley put down the thole which he had been shaping with his pocket-knife, and going to the mantelpiece, opened a japanned tobacco-box which stood on it, and

took out a license, which he gave me to read. It ran thus :—

INCORPORATED 1827.

BUMBOAT.

I hereby certify that Parsley Smiles, of Three Colt Street, in the parish of Limehouse, in the County of Middlesex, is this day registered in a book of the Company of the Masters, Wardens, and Commonalty of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames, kept for that purpose, to use, work, or navigate a boat called a skiff, named *Bluebell*, number 51, for the purpose of selling, disposing of, or exposing for sale, to and amongst the seamen, or other persons employed in and about any of the ships or vessels upon the said river, any liquors, slops, or other articles whatsoever, between London Bridge and Limehouse Hole; but the said boat is not to be used on the said river for any other purpose than the aforesaid.

JOHN SMITH, *Clerk*.

WATERMAN'S HALL, *

June —, 18—.

‘Three-and-sixpence, sir, *that* cost me,’ said Parsley, as he folded up his license again and replaced it in the tobacco-box; ‘and I’d to sell my frame and properties at a sacrifice, and I give more than I’d give now for my old boat; but I won’t complain. Goin’ on for eight months now I’ve been at my new business, and I won’t deny that I’ve done a deal better at it than I did with Punch. The nip the ice give us yisterday was the only bit o’ bad luck we’ve ’ad, and the man I bought my boat of says he’ll ’ave her all right agin by to-morrer. I’ll not complain, sir. My present business is real business—sellin’ money’s worth for men’s money without makin’ a fool ot yerself;

not gittin' children's coppers for nonsense. Arnin' my bread at Punch—specially since it's been sich poor pay—al'ays seemed to me a kind o' make-believe sort o' business, and I'm glad I'm out of it, sir, and ain't got to squeak an' make jokes agin my disposition.'

'But what is it you do, and how did you learn to manage a boat?' I asked again.

'Well, sir, when I was with that old blind man I've told you of—Dark Davy—I used to go out on the river of an evenin', and the man I bought my boat of I knew then, an' he put me up to makin' a livin' out o' the river, an' though I don't profess to be a waterman, I've picked up my pullin' agin' and got used to the scrougin' and the steamers, which they made me funky at first, and that I won't deny. Now Tom at startin' was never skeared, and he can pull better than me—I don't mean for strength, but in the way o' nateral knack, you understand, sir. Tom was meant for a sailor. He'll run up the riggin' o' the craft we go aboard on like a monkey possessed. There's more than one skipper's offered to take him, and that's how it will have to be, I guess, though his mother don't like the thoughts ot his follerin' a seafarin' life.'

'But why are you called a purl-man?'

'Well, sir, that I can't ezactly say—only that's what all in my line *is* called. You see I pulls about in my boat to the ships, and sells beer to the sailors and the riggers and the coalwhippers, and sich. I've a fire aboard my boat, and I warms the beer up with a sprinkle o' sugar

and ginger, and jest a drop o' Jacky—and a real comfort it is to my customers, on sich a day as this, we'll say, or when there's a fog on the river as if all the world was a-gittin' its washin' done at once. Tom 'as to keep the bell goin' then pretty brisk, or we shouldn't know where we was wanted. Last November we lost ourselves, an' 'ad to stay all night in the boat ; but we run her into a sort o' ditch, and made ourselves snug. We'd grub aboard, and we took a drop o' the 'ot beer, and we'd coals enough to keep up a good fire, and a bit o' tarpaulin we rigged to keep the snow off ; so we should ha' been as jolly as sandboys, if it 'adn't been for thinkin' that mother an' Fanny would be frettin' about us. It's a deal better livin' than the Punch line, sir. There's no trampin' about, cold and 'ungery, with a 'eavy frame on your shoulders, or a 'eavy box a-luggin' at ycr lines, and takin' nuffink arter all. We're sure of a welcome, wherever we goes, and the pay's good, and, all things considered, it's sure, too—leastways, I've lost next to nothin' in the way o' bad debts. And it's real business that a man needn't be ashamed of. No, sir, it's not encouragin' drunkenness, not a bit of it. A drop of good drink—jest enough to do 'em good—I sells to men jest when they're most in need of it, at their work. Money's worth for their money I gives 'em, not doctored stuff, halt salt, sich as the public sells to make the silly fellers go on drinkin'. They ain't beholden to me, an' I ain't beholden to them. It's better than being a Punchy, sir. My old 'ooman she will go on workin' for the tailors, but she needn't i she

didn't like. We're a deal more comfor'bler than we was, thank' God. Shoulder o' mutton an' taties, or leg o' pork, or somethin' o' that, we can have every Sunday now, an' then the children goes to Sunday-school an' the missis she goes to church or else to chapel, an' I smokes my pipe in peace an' quietness, without 'avin' to wonder where on earth I'm to git to-morrer's bread from ; an' in the evenin' we locks up, an' all on us goes to church, an' takes a walk arterwards, when the weather's fine, an' then we comes 'ome, an' 'as our supper, and the missis reads a chapter and the colic, an' the young uns sings a hymn, and we goes to 'bed feelin' comfor'ble. It's a deal better than bein' a Punchy, ain't it, old gal? I 'ope, though, this weather 'on't last, or there'll be no gittin' about in the river. The bit o' ice that give us a scrunch yesterday, was a deal bigger than the boat. We jumped out of her pretty brisk, and scrambled aboard the ship we was alongside of. Hows'ever, she warn't so much 'urt, arter all ; an' the master was goin' ashore, an' give us leave to come in his boat, and took ourn in tow, an' she'll be all right agin to-morrer ; so I ain't much call to complain, have I, sir? It's a deal better than bein' a Punchy, and more satisfyin' to a man's feelinks every ways.'

Of course, I was very pleased to find that Parsley's circumstances had improved considerably since I 'first made his acquaintance ; but still I could not help fancying, and regretting, that the change had made him selfish. The comparative comfort which his new calling enabled him to enjoy was almost the only thing, I thought, he

cared about. I was altogether wrong, as I generally find that I have been when I have formed an unfavourable judgment. It was natural enough that the poor man should contrast complacently the advantages of his new life with the privations which he and his family had long suffered ; but prosperity had not made Parsley selfish—it had rather ripened a kindliness of disposition which had lain almost latent, half starved in him during the time of his poverty.

About a fortnight afterwards I again looked in at Parsley's. He and his son were out on the river. Fanny was laying the cloth for dinner, and Mrs Smiles was rubbing with onion and salt the raw-looking chilblained feet of a slightly-built, liquid-eyed, golden-syrup-complexioned, green-turbaned East Indian, who, although the weather had broken, and he was muffled up in some of Parsley's warm woollen clothes, was crouching and shivering, 'goose-skinned,' over the fire. Miserable though he looked, his native politeness manifested itself when I entered the room. He gave one of those Eastern smiles which would be so winning, if the person smiled at could be quite sure that they meant anything, and, if so, that they did not mean just the opposite of the good-will they express. He tried to rise and make a salaam, but Mrs Smiles pushed him back into his chair, saying kindly, 'There, you sitt'ee still, Mr 'yder. Sitt'ee still, me say. The gentleman 'll excuse yc. His feet are awful bad, sir, and he hasn't got the strength of a cat, poor crittur !'

And again she rubbed the onion and salt into Mr

'Hyder's' swollen toes. Hyder winced under the friction, and yet he looked very grateful to Mrs Smiles notwithstanding, and talked to her and little Fanny in broken English, and laughed merrily when they answered him in the same ; as proudly pleased with their linguistic performance as if they had had Sanscrit, Arabic, Persian, Telugu, Marathi, Hindustani, Bengali, and Gujrathi at their tongues' tips. It made me think of the honest little woman in Bleeding Hart Yard, whose conversation with her foreigner Dickens has reported with so much truthful humour.

This Hyder was a *protégé* of the Smileses. How he came to be so I did not learn until afterwards, since the table-cloth and the bubbling saucepan (the lid of which Fanny removed every second minute, harpooning something oleaginously savoury with a black-handled, two-pronged fork) made me at that time beat a hasty retreat. But on another occasion, when I had Hyder all to myself, I heard his history in his own words, and I think I cannot do better than reproduce them :—

'My name Mirza Hyder. Missa Hyder Missis Smile call me. She tink Mirza all de same as Missa. Ah, but she is so kind woman, and Missa Smile is so kind, and de leetle girl. I no like de leetle boy to call me nigger—I no nigger, I Bengal Mussulman—but de leetle boy kind too. I once soldier—Sepoy, you know. But—but—I run away. I no like it, you understand. Den I come over the black water from Calcutta—what you call Lascar—to your docks here in big ship. Serang very

bad man. Bad rice, no ghee, much floggee. Too much floggee for Mirza. I run away again. So cold. De sun not get up for tree week. I shiver, shiver all day long. But de kind Inglis people give me monee. I buy broom, sweep streets, sell de leetle books. More monee. Sahib painter say to me, "Come, I will put you into my picture." More monee. More painter gentlemen say same. More monee. Rich soon as de Lord Mayor, but I feel very lonely. My fader in India, no one here dat know me. De sun not look de same as in India. All so cold. I want to dream and forget dis contree. I lodge den where dere is Chinaman, and he take me to 'nother Chinaman—what you call Blugate Fields—where dey smoke de opium. Pay your monee, lie on de bed, and smoke de pipe, and have de good dreams. Spend all my monee dat way. No can get any more for long time. I starve, but officer gentleman dat know me in India see me in Hyde Park, and give me monée. I buy tom-tom of Arab man, and me and Arab man beat tom-tom and sing song West-end, East-end, all round about. Arab man play tom-tom very fine—he make it talk and answer to itself—but he keep all de monee. And he leave me when de cold come again—no monee, no bread, no rice, and bad in my bed. Dey soon turn me out of my bed, when dey know me no monee. I go out with my tom-tom, but my fingers too cold. Too cold in all my body. Only my cotton clothes on, and me very bad, and my legs shake. Snow, frost, everywhere—on de ground, in de sky, in my heart, in de

Inglis people's eyes. No rich Inglis people where I am, all poor people. De poor people no pity my belly—deir own bellies empty. I tink me try for a ship again—get back wherè de sun shine, and de rice is sheap. So I come down here, but when I get to de wall where de graves are, I tumble down—it so cold—me tink I soon die. De people go by and look at me, and some say, “poor shap,” and some say me sheat ; but not one help me till Missa Smile come. He pull me up on his back and carry me home like de sack of coals, and he give me food and clothes and fire. Every one here so kind. Missis Smile buy rice and curry powder, and curry sprats, and rub my toes for me—a leetle too hard. Leetle girl wait on me, and laugh, and play my tom-tom, and sing me Inglis songs. Leetle boy give up his bed for me. Nine days me here, and dey no tired yet. Missis Smile read me de Bible, and bring parson gentleman, and say she m^ake a Christian of me before she let me go. I say—for a joke, you understand—“me no turn Christian den for a long time yet, Missis Smile—I like to stay where I am. I gettin’ on, Missis Smile—very fond of Missa Smile’s hot beer—I no die Mussulman—so you have patience, Missis Smile.”’

I am not aware that Hyder formally became a Christian before he left Three Colt Street, but I think he must have carried away a very favourable impression of the Christianity of his hosts there.

It was not until Hyder was quite strong again, and had had his wardrobe replenished by Mrs and Fanny

Smiles's busy fingers, and with donations from Parsley's and Tom's not over-abundant stock of clothes, that Parsley went to that admirable institution, the Strangers' Home—near as the West India Road is to Three Colt Street—and made known the case of his *protégé* to the courteous old Indian officer—child-like in the courageous simplicity of his Christianity—who gives as much time (and far more energetic service) to the Home as if he received a handsome salary for his assiduous attendance there, instead of managing the establishment, as he does, purely 'for love' of its Oriental, African, and Polynesian inmates.

A ship was soon obtained for Mirza Hyder. Parsley and Tom in their purl-boat saw him as his vessel was being towed down from the London Docks to Gravesend, and Hyder saw them. 'Your hot beer very good, Missa Smile,' the East Indian shouted, squatting monkey-like on the larboard cat-head. 'Good-bye Missa Smile, good-bye, leetle Tom. Many tanks to you, all of you. Tell Missis Smile and leetle Fanny my love. I remember you all in India—tell my fader how good you all was.'

XIX.

A VULGAR MINISTERING ANGEL.



THE world knows nothing of its greatest men, says the poet. I am not quite sure about that. At any rate, I am inclined to think that some of the men whom I have heard quote the line with great complacency—not openly, but evidently impliedly, as descriptive of their own condition—might possibly not have been considered great, even if the world *had* known anything about them. But however this may be, I feel quite sure that the world knows nothing of some of its best women. ‘A taste for low society’ is shuddered at in England. Nevertheless, I thankfully acknowledge that I possess that intensely vulgar predilection: thankfully, because it has made me acquainted with a good many of those obscure angels.

The angel that I am going to write about kept a coffee-stall on the Surrey side of the river, and wore a man’s

drab, big-buttoned, many-caped great-coat instead of wings of snowy down. Her rugged face was very much like the knobby head of the Saul amongst walking-sticks which may be seen towering in the centre of a dusty sheaf of the same outside a barber's-door. Her upper lip was shaded at the corners with what a beard-coveting hobby-dehoy would have considered a very respectable pair of incipient moustaches. Her name was Betty Deadman. She used her h's not according to any discoverable rule, but seemed to throw them in just as youthful Ritualists, with more zeal than knowledge, throw in little bobs and bows and bends at any part of the service in which they fancy they will come in handy. In one sense, she was a very ignorant old woman—to save her life she could not have spelt 'Constantinople' or pronounced 'statistics;' and yet Betty Deadman was full of 'sweetness and light,' beside which many a 'Philistine'-contemner's supply of the same would have seemed vinegar contrasted with mead, a farthing rushlight with a cheerful Christmas fire. Both physically and morally this humble old woman, in the ever-widening circle of activity she made for herself, was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

'Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' The rescue of humanity from physical and moral evil, the telling of glad tidings of spiritual joy to those whose life

of suffering made them stand most in need of comfort—those were the Christ-credentials which Jesus claimed. 'Grâce à Jésus, l'existence la plus terne, la plus absorbée par de tristes ou humiliants devoirs, a eu son échappée sur un coin du ciel.' If that be the true idea of the Christ, and if those are his truest followers who strive hardest, however humbly, to tread in his footsteps, old Betty Deadman was a genuine Christian. Some of her acquaintances were what 'respectable people' might have termed a most disreputable lot, but in the fearless freedom with which she associated with Waterloo Road harlots and people of that stamp, Betty was Christ-like again. Her object in associating with them freely was, in its little way, the same as Christ's when he made his Pharisee host sneer at his claim to prophetic insight because He had not shrunk from the touch of a woman who was a notorious sinner. Betty, like Christ, wanted to do sinners good, and thought that the *unlike*liest way to do it was to talk to them with, so to speak, averted head and a camphor-bag held ostentatiously to the nose. People who are so dreadfully afraid of catching wickedness would act wisely, I think, if they avoided all contact with whom they look down upon as sinners. The fidgety fear of infection may be a symptom of predisposition to the disease.

It was on the Surrey-side approach to one of the bridges that Betty Deadman pitched her stall, generally about midnight: a very cosy-looking stall, roofed and screened from draughts by tarpaulin and old blankets.

Betty's armchair was placed in a snug bay of blanket, and in it, whilst she served her customers, she often gave a rest and meal to some poor dog-tired, foot-sore, famished, cold-pinched night-wanderer. The huge tin, brass-bound and brass-tapped coffee-cans gleamed in the blaze of Betty's two lamps like polished silver zoned with burnished gold. The round red eyes of the glowing charcoal-pans that kept the coffee-cans hot beamed a hearty welcome through the frosty, foggy, rainy, or dim, chill night air. Betty did not profess to sell 'Mocha' or white sugar; but a cup of her coffee, however made or sweetened, was—I speak from experience—a very palatable warmer and 'freshener' in the dreary small hours. Her currant-cake also was in great demand, although rather too greasy for my personal taste. Her (seconds) bread and (salt) butter, however, I have often munched with great enjoyment, as a very late supper or very early breakfast; and her ham-sandwiches, in size, in succulence, and in savour, were very different comestibles from the tiny squares of dry deal shavings and chips of salt ship-timber that, in spite of the improvements which enterprising restaurateurs have introduced into our system of public refection, are still sold as sandwiches, out of 'exhausted-receiver' glass receptacles, at Alton Ale-houses, Luncheon Bars, and Railway Refreshment Rooms. Betty sold watercress, moreover, and boiled eggs, and those of her customers who indulged in such 'relishes' generally approved of their quality. The eggs were not *always* eatable, but that was the fault of the

shopkeeper from whom Betty bought them. At the first and faintest indication of non-relish on the part of a consumer, Betty was eager to substitute a sound egg for the one suspiciously regarded. Such exchanges, however, had not often to be made; partly because the majority of her customers had appetites keen as to quantity rather than quality, and partly because she was an honest old woman who would not, knowingly, help a dishonest shopkeeper to get rid of his damaged stock, by buying at a reduced rate unwholesome eggs with the understanding that she would be able to palm them off at full price as sound.

When I first made Betty's acquaintance, I had an engagement on the Surrey side of the river which kept me there after midnight, but which did not pay me well enough to leave a margin for cab-fare back into Middlesex. Accordingly, whatever the weather might be, I had to tramp homewards. It was a somewhat wearily long tramp, but I am glad now that I had to tramp it, since it made me familiar with phases of London life of which otherwise I should have known nothing. I do not mean merely that it gave me material which I have since been able, in Emerson's phrase, to 'grind into paint.' It enlarged my knowledge of human nature with moral benefit to myself. I saw much to sadden and to sicken, but I saw it under circumstances that gave me a far clearer insight into its causes than I should have had if I had only read about it in reports; had heard, in Mr Maurice's forcible language, 'masses of creatures'

—fellow-creatures—‘spoken of as if they were the insects we look at in a microscope.’ Rub shoulders with concrete instances of want and wickedness, and you will not be so philosophically and pharisaically inclined as you may have been before to return a complacent verdict of ‘Sarve ’em right’ on the victims of want and wickedness. For one thing, although you will often see that want is the consequence of wickedness, you will also be led to suspect that the wickedness is, in a sadly numerous proportion of instances, the result of the want. Of course, that is no absolute excuse for the wicked; they *ought* to have starved rather than yielded to temptation. But, in a relative point of view, such experience teaches charity. A man, unless he be besottedly self-righteous, will have some unpleasant misgivings as to the moral worth of his decorous behaviour—will be inclined to ask himself whether, if exposed to the same temptations, he would not have been guilty of the same sins, when he makes the acquaintance of outcasts, not as initials in a colourless, cut and dried ‘your committee’ narrative, or as mere units in its figure-columns, but as skinny or loathsomely bloated men, women, and children. It is a startling thing when one realizes the fact that, perhaps, the greater portion—at any rate, a very large portion—of what we call ‘respectability,’ ‘amiability,’ ‘good character,’ and so on, is simply the result of favourable social circumstances. We don’t sin because we are not tempted, or because we are deprived of the opportunities. Hundreds of people who, if left

to themselves, would fall as certainly as a single card falls when set on end, prop one another up as cards prop one another up in a card-house.

But I saw charity-teaching Good, as well as Evil, during those small-hour journeys; not in Betty Deadman alone, but it is of her I have now to tell.

I soon discovered her character. The fourth or fifth time I stopped at her stall, a drenched, draggle-tailed girl stopped at it also. She, perhaps, had once been pretty, she was not more than seventeen; but her prematurely old and vice-lined face was horrible to look upon.

‘Oh, Sally, you hout *agin!*’ said Betty, reproachfully. ‘What was it as you promised me?’

‘I can’t starve, mother,’ Sally answered, flippantly. ‘Give us a cup o’ cawfee and some bread an’ butter, an’ I’ll pay you honest, I will, soon ’s ever I get the browns.’

‘I wouldn’t take your money, Sally; no, not hif I was starvin’. I’d as soon ’ave a ’andful o’ muck as money got your way. But I’ll give ye somethin’ to eat an’ drink. There, go an’ sit ye down out o’ the rain, poor thing. You look as if you ’adn’t got a dry thread to yer back.’

I will give the history of this girl, as I afterwards learnt it from Betty Deadman and herself, as one illustration of Betty’s labours.

Sally was the daughter of a Deptford shipwright, who died when she was about eleven. Her mother married

again. The new husband was a drunken, brutal loafer, who took possession of the little money the former husband had left his wife, turned her neat furniture and her clothes and her child's clothes into money, drank all the money out, and then treated his wife and stepdaughter with most cowardly barbarity. Her mother obtained a 'slavey's' place in Church Street for Sally; but poor little Sally was not much benefited by the change. Her life from morning till night was one long, dreary drudgery, only varied by her mistress's cruelty. She boxed Sally's ears with the scrubbing-brush, she beat her with the copper-stick, she pulled the hair out of her head, she pinched her black and blue and green, she made her share with the cat the broken victuals of the house, and the cat was decidedly the better fed of the two. The poor child had no one to take her part. It was useless for her to think of seeking refuge at home—she had, indeed, no 'home' to go to. Her mother, according to the mysterious fashion of womankind, was fond of the bullying blackguard who thrashed her and forced her to support him, and sided with him against her child. 'Yes, he used to lick her as bad as ever,' Sally said to me, with a chuckle; 'and sarve her right, for takin' him arter father. Ah, if father 'd been livin', wouldn't he ha' hided the beast for layin' his 'and upon me? Father was fond o' me; mother worn't never. If father 'd lived, I might ha' been different. Father used to take me out for a walk a-Sundays—Greenwich Park, and the Heath, and Nunhead, and Peckham Rye

we used to go to ; and father 'd tell me stories an' buy me horanges. I used to like father,—there worn't none to care for me when he was took. Brown-kiteses he died on ; and the neighbours said mother worn't sorry.'

Sally ran away from her place at last. She had taken some hot coals in a dustpan from the kitchen to light the parlour fire, and, tripping, had sent them flying over the hearthrug and carpet. Dreading the merciless beating she was sure to get if she waited until her mistress smelt the singed woollen, she rushed out to seek shelter in London, and ran, as if the avenger of blood were at her heels, until she had passed the New Cross turnpike ; and even then she did not venture to walk, but trotted on breathlessly some way beyond the New Peckham canal-bridge.

That night, guided by some girls with whom she had got into talk, she slept in a lodging-house in one of the dismal off-shoots of dingy, villanous-looking Kent Street, and, mere child as she still was, it was not long before she was a prostitute.

There are people who do not like to be reminded of such awful plague-spots in our social system. 'Such horrors may exist in tropical heathen lands, but in Christian England !—no, we won't believe it, or if we cannot deny it, we will shut our eyes to the fact, and call any one who ventures to disturb our complacency by telling the truth about it in plain English a coarse-minded, prurient fellow, who should be kicked out of decent society.'

Of course, it is a selfishly pleasant mode of existence to be able to go through life

‘ Seeing only what is fair,
Sipping only what is sweet ;’

but if it is our duty to try to make the world better than we found it, what then? Ignoring a notorious evil will not cure it. I shall, therefore, tell of Sally’s life in lodging-houses as plainly as the decencies of language will permit. Since low lodging-houses have been placed under police-supervision, I should add, their condition has certainly been improved, both sanitarily and morally—superficially morally, at any rate—but the lodging-houses in which Sally lived were not under police-inspection; and even now, with police-inspectors, clergy, city missionaries, and Scripture readers turned in upon them intermittently, such places are often sinks of moral filth, and the fact that children barely in their teens earn a wretched living by loathsome vice in this steeple-bristled London can only be denied by those who suffer from ‘won’t-see’ blindness.

The lodgers at the house to which Sally was taken were almost all of them young, boys and girls of from twelve to fifteen or sixteen years of age. Nearly all of them were thieves, and at night both sexes were packed together by the score, and left, without any supervision, to say and do whatever they pleased in the dark, filthy bedchambers. It was not long before Sally was as bad as any of her fellow-lodgers. She thieved and walked the streets for her own support, and to provide her

favourite lad with pocket-money. He often showed his gratitude by blackening Sally's eyes, knocking her down on the lodging-house floor, and kicking her brutally with his metal-tipped boots. Sometimes she was in jail, sometimes in hospital, often she had no roof to cover her. With no money in her hand, no companion to pay it for her, no stolen goods to sell, it was vain for her to seek the shelter of the wretched ruins in which she generally lodged. She had then to wander about all night, weary, cold, and hungry—pouncing literally upon husks that swine eat, striving to make a meal off sodden orange-peel and potato-peel, gooseberry skins and pea-shucks; or else to curl herself up in her drenched rags in a bridge-recess, under an arch, or on a door-step. That is the 'gay' life of many a *fille de joie* in the poor parts of London. Both when she had and when she had not money, Sally often stopped at Betty Deadman's stall. The good old woman took an interest in the poor young outcast, and tried to save her from the streets. Sally would gladly have been saved, but it is far easier to tumble into a horrible pit of miry clay than to clamber out of it. How was Sally to live whilst looking for an honest mode of life? Who, after all, would employ her? Those were two formidable obstacles, but when Betty had got over them by taking Sally for a time into her own little home, and then recommending her for service, a more formidable obstacle still remained. Sally's vicious life had told upon her as such a life tells more or less on every one.

She might loathe it—dread and detest its consequences, at any rate—and yet when the novelty of a change to virtuous ways was past, she was disposed to hanker after the excitement, miserable though it was, of her old life once more. The night when I first saw Sally was not the first time nor the last in which Betty Deadman found that the trouble she had taken with Sally had been thrown away. But Betty was not one of those pettishly impatient philanthropists who cast off people who won't be made good in an instant as angrily as impatient little girls fling down dolls they cannot at once dress to their fancy. She did not think that the failure of past efforts on Sally's behalf freed her from all responsibility as to future efforts. She had become very fond of Sally, and Sally in her flighty, hysteric, and yet heartfelt fashion, was very fond of her; and so Betty, as she phrased it, 'went on peggin' away to save the poor gal.' Once more she took Sally into her own little home, and made her useful there too. At night, moreover, Sally helped Betty to wheel the stall to its pitch, set it up, and serve the customers. This kind of life just suited Sally. She felt safe through being almost always with Betty; she got to take a pride and pleasure in work, through having to do it for her friend; and the night-work gave her new life a spice of freedom and excitement, from the lack of which penitentiaries, and servants' places in excellent but primly quiet families, often become unendurable to suddenly-caged street-roamers. But although this life with Betty was not an injudiciously devised preparation

for completer domesticity, it was still somewhat perilous for Sally. Kent Street was not very far from the coffee-stall; the 'Mint' was not very far; and from their 'padding-kens' and the places in which Sally had lodged on the other side of the river—the purlieus of Drury Lane, and Golden Lane, the thief-colonies of Spitalfields and Whitechapel—former acquaintances ever and anon recognized her, chaffed her, and sometimes bullied her, when they found that she was trying to earn an honest living under Betty Deadman. Sally on the whole bore the chaffing very good-temperedly, and when the bullying was getting unbearable, Betty could generally enlist volunteers to scatter the bullies. Still Betty felt very anxious about Sally, as I learnt afterwards.

One night when I missed the girl from the stall, I made inquiries about her, expressing a hope that she had not once more gone astray.

'No, sir,' answered Betty. 'I do 'ope now there's no fear o' that. She's laid like a load on my 'eart, but now she's where she'll be well looked arter, an' glad I am, though I shall miss the poor dear gal; for she was very willin' and like a daughter to me she'd got to be, which was pleasant to a lonely old ooman. I'd a daughter myself once, but she died when she was a baby, and I've never had a child since—no, sir, neither boy nor gal, and I've been a widdy this forty years. I shall miss Sally, for we was both wery fond o' one another. You see, sir, I used to think, "There, if your own dear child had a-lived, how could you ha' borne to see her goin' to the bad

like that poor gal?" and so I mixed 'em up together like. Well, sir, I've been wantin' to get Sally away from here—there was too many as knows her for it to be safe. But how to do it, I didn't know. Sally won't take to every one, even if every one would take a gal that's been on the streets into their houses; an' if she'd run away agin' she'd ha' been ashamed to come to me, and I do think it would ha' broke my heart if she'd gone back to her bad ways. But the Lord's made it plain for me. The clergyman o' the church where I goes and his good lady have allus been very kind to me, lookin' in to see how I was, an' sich, an' they've been very good to Sally, too. Well, sir, it might be three weeks ago, or it might be, p'r'aps, a little more than a month, say, when Mrs Green come in and she says, "We're going abroad, Mrs Deadman—to a country called Mpreton Bay—ever so far off." "What, mum, acrost the sea?" says I. "However will you manage with them dear children?" "That's just what I was going to speak about," says she. "I shall want a servant. The one that I have now is afraid of the sea. Do you know of a girl that will suit me?" "Wouldn't Sally do, mum?" says I. It came into my mind all of a suddent, like a flash o' lightning. "The change 'ud be good for her, and she'd like it, I think; and she's a great notion of you, mum, and you'd keep your eye on her, I know, mum, an' she might get a husband hout there, and be a honest ooman with no one to say a word agin her." Well, sir, Mrs Green was doubtful about it for a bit, but I spoke up, an' give Sally the character she well desarves.

"I don't want to git rid on her—far from it, mum," says I. "If I didn't think it 'ud be for her good to git away, I should be*glad enough to have her with me hallus." Well, so Mrs Green says she'll talk to Mr Green about it, and this wery mornin,' sir, I went down to Gravesen' wi' my poor dear gal, and went aboard the ship with her, and by this time she's on the sea. An' now she'll do well, I do hope an' trust. The Lord be praised.'

XX.

A NIGHT WITHOUT A MORROW.

IN another instance Betty was literally eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. In one of the wretched little streets lying between the Waterloo Road and the Blackfriars Road there lived, in a single room of a little house which would scarcely have made a decent-sized chamber if all its floors had been knocked into one, a lame man and his blind wife. The man had once been a bricklayer's labourer, but a fall from a scaffold had almost deprived him of the use of his right leg, and weakened him generally to such an extent, that he was quite unfitted for hod-carrying—indeed, for any labour that required activity and strength. He made a precarious living by hawking lark-turfs and birds' green food. His wife had lost her sight through small-pox. Before her attack she had been employed as a nail-bag maker, and at this work she was still able to earn a trifle.

I got to know this couple and Betty's relations to them thus.

Just before sunrise one summer morning I turned down the gas in my dingy, close little office, took my hat, and started homewards. Even on the Surrey side there was a faint hint of morning freshness in the air. Sparrows were beginning to chirp on the roofs of the dim low houses and dim lofty business-places—business-places, except for the sparrows, as silent as sepulchres—that I passed. A dusky bigger bird flew from its roost in an X-shaped pile of planks in a timber-yard. An unseen cock, imprisoned in a cellar, proclaimed the morn in the most lugubrious of crows. A prowling white cat in an unkempt churchyard made me think of a ghost stealing back to its grave on all fours. When I got into the main thoroughfare that led to my bridge, I came upon a line of market-waggons grinding along beneath their high-piled loads of beans, cauliflowers, salad, asparagus, peas, cucumbers, vegetable marrows, turnips, carrots, gooseberries, and currants. In the eastern sky there was a rippled, dappled flush of almost ruby-red, reflected in the else dim river, and warming up in patches the below-bridge huddled craft, and wharfs, and towering warehouses. The above-bridge shot-towers had not yet caught the glow, and the moored empty above-bridge steamers and lighters, and hay and straw barges aground on the pebbly riverside hards, as yet free from mudlarks, had not the half-roused look of the below-bridge vessels, but seemed still sound asleep. A lame man limped away

from Betty Deadman's stall, as I stopped at it. He could put both feet to the ground, but in one he seemed to have no power, and so was obliged to half swing, half shuffle along, leaning on a crutch. He had an empty basket slung from his shoulder, and a pale, thin, hollow-cheeked face under a brimless hat, which was really the frayed crown of an old-fashioned black straw bonnet. The morning wakening around me had cheered me, but the sight of this poor ragged fellow dimmed the rippled red light in the eastern sky.

'Thankee kindly, Betty,' he said in a hopeless, heavy voice, as he slouched away.

'Who is that?' I inquired.

'Oh, that's poor Be'mont, the chickweed man. I gives him a cup o' cawfee to hearten him for his work, poor chap. He wants it, for he's sich a sufferer that all the sperrit orfen seems took out on him, you'll understand, and, as like as not, he won't have bite nor sup but what he's took here till he comes home at night dead beat. And his wife's a great sufferer, too, poor thing; but she ain't so down-hearted as poor Be'mont. She's lost her eyesight; but she don't suffer so much pain as her husband, wery like, and so she keeps her sperrits better. They lives near me.'

And so I got to know where, and afterwards, from their own lips, *how* they lived, and how good Betty Deadman did her best to help them.

In the little 'first-floor back' room in which they lived, a flock bed on the floor, a greasy old rug, a tat-

tered mud-coloured blanket, a box like a seaman's chest, a smaller one without a lid, a bent, wasted poker, an old porter's chair, and a few bottles and a little crockery, were the only 'furniture' I could discover. The porter's chair was in the last stage of dusty decay; but it was the only thing in the place which had the slightest look of comfort. The blind woman always made her husband take it when he came home tired out with his long rambles—that is, unless he were so tired as to at once stretch himself upon the bed. Whilst he sat in the porter's chair, she would sit on the floor in the midst of her coarse sacking, always stitching away, but every now and then trying to say a cheerful—at any rate, a sociable—word to her depressed husband.

The wife's bag-making was not regular, and when she was busiest at it, the amount she had to receive on Saturday was very, very small. Still it was better than nothing. Good Betty saved her time and trouble by procuring her material for her, and Betty was the blind woman's guide also to and from the place for which she made her bags. Every now and then, moreover, Betty came to the rescue of the poor creatures, who had pawned everything they possessed pawnable, when they were pressed for rent, and many a little meal besides the regular breakfast on week days, she gave him at her stall, had Be'mont and his wife to thank Betty for. Winter and summer, Be'mont got up before daylight and plodded out to Peckham Rye, Dulwich, or some such neighbourhood, in which there were building plots, open turf, and brick-

fields, to cut clover-sods, and pluck chickweed, groundsel, and plantain. When he had filled his basket he crawled back with it, and went his weary sale-rounds fasting—not getting ‘home’ until seven or eight in the evening. At least that was how he spent his day when he was able to get out. Sometimes—although to stay at home on a week day (not trying to do, as he phrased it, the little he could) was mental agony to Be’mont—the physical agony he frequently suffered compelled the poor fellow to stay at home. He would grovel, moaning, on the flock bed then, whilst his wife sat by him on the floor, busy ever with her drearily monotonous stitching, but finding time to say a kind word, or to give a fond inarticulate croon as often as she thought it would be acceptable. I dare say some of Be’mont’s customers sometimes could not help thinking what a striking difference there was between their fondly tended, carolling feathered pets and the sad, weak, hungry, haggard, ragged man who brought them their dainties and their shamrocked cushions. Betty Deadman was more practical in her pity. As soon as she came home with her stall, if Be’mont had not called at it for his breakfast in the morning, she would look in at his lodgings to see what had become of him. If she found that he was at home ill, and that the couple had no money to buy food, she would give them food ; if they had money she would go with it to the chandler’s and make their purchases for them. If Be’mont was very ill indeed she fetched the parish doctor, but both Be’mont and his wife disliked the

doctor's visits. They were afraid that his attendance would end in their being forced to go into 'the house,' and that was their horror. Their home might have been thought a strange one to cling to, their companionship a source of very little mutual comfort ; and yet they did cling to their poverty-stricken 'independence' and 'freedom' in the first-floor back ; the crippled chickweed-seller *was* unwilling to be separated from his blind wife, and the blind nail-bag-maker to be separated from her crippled husband.

When my Surrey-side engagement came to an end, my small-hour chats with Betty Deadman, of course, became far less frequent ; but when by any chance I found myself near her pitch at a time when her stall was likely to be on it, I made a point of renewing my acquaintance with the good old woman. One sultry summer night, about two years after the cool summer morning when I had first seen Be'mont, I came upon Betty just as she had finished pitching her stall. There was a sulphury heat in the gloomy air that made her charcoal fires seem for once unseasonable. A hot awful hush brooded over the big black city—only broken by the occasional rattle of a passing vehicle, or a mutter of distant thunder—less distant every time it muttered. It was plain that a storm was fast working up, but I thought that I should have plenty of time for a chat with my stall-keeper before it burst.

'Law, sir, is that you, sir?' she said, when she recognized me. 'It's a age since I see ye, an' now you'd

better drink your cawfee an' be off, for it'll be pourin' afore long.

Trusting, however, to my superior weather-wisdom, I continued chatting until the storm did burst, and Betty and I had both to take shelter in her blanket-bay. The rain poured down in torrents; the pathway, gutter, roadway were almost indistinguishable when the lightning gilt the water that seemed to be running and splashing equally in all. River, craft, riverside, dark and grey jumble of roofs, walls, windows, steeples, towers, now spread plain in a pulsating glow of pinkish-blue, and anon there was, for the twinkling of an eye, a great zig-zag crack of white-hot light across the dense dark mass, and then the aching eye looked out again on utter blackness, whilst the thunder rumbled overhead as if the fallen stars were rolling along the floor of some vast firmament, and down huge stairs that hung from it over earth. When a flash of lightning lit up the cross of St. Paul's and shot sheer downwards athwart the dome, the picturesque effect was sublime. Betty did not look at the storm from an æsthetic point of view. Without being in the least scared, she was thoroughly awed. She held the old childish belief that the thunder was the actual voice of an offended God. Like many another true believer in Christ, she was not free from the heathenish notion that God is a capriciously angry Being, who can only be approached with propitiatory dread—instead of regarding Him as Christ did, as a Father going forth to meet wanderers, when yet a great way off, whose heart-hun-

ger has driven them back to his unweariedly waiting love.

At last, after circling round and round, the storm worked off northwards, rear-rumbling as it went. The rain ceased to rush down on, and cascade off, our tarpaulin roof. Suddenly it ceased to patter even. The outside, freshened air seemed to heave a sigh of relief, and Betty and I came out of our sodden blanket-bay. Whilst Betty was replenishing her no longer unwelcome fires, and mopping up leakages and drippings from her oil-clothed counter, she told me the sequel of poor Be'mont's history.

'We ain't had sich a storm as this,' she said, 'since last December twelvemonth.' There was snow an' hail, then, and snow an' hail and thunder an' lightnin' seemed so unnateral like, though it was'nt the first time I'd known 'em together, that I thought I'd rather be a-bed, 'specially since there was next to nobody about, and home I went, an' I've repented it once, an' that's been ever since. You remember Be'mont, sir?—the lame man that used to sell birds' stuff. Well, poor man, he was in a wery bad way just then. 'Cept his cawfee in the mornin', there was next to nothin' I could do for him, for I was in a bad way myself that hard winter; and he'd been ailin' orfener than usual, and his poor wife had been took into the House, an' he was wery desolate. I'd say to him, "You sells birds' stuff, Be'mont, in ha'porths, an' you should think of Him as said, 'Are not five sparrows sold for two fardin's, and not one of them is forgotten be-

fore God. But even the wery hairs o' yer head are all num'ered. Fear not, therefore: ye are o' more wally than many sparrers.'" But it worn't no good—not a mite o' good, poor man. "Betty," says he—he were that desperate—"God could soon count the hairs o' my head, I hadn't got so many, but it ain't worth the trouble, an' I can't see the good as 'ud come on it if He did. God may care for the sparrers, but He don't care for me, as I see. If it worn't for my old gal, I wouldn't care much what come of me. I should like," says he, "to keep the place for her to come home to when they lets her out, poor old gal. An' I thank you kindly, Betty," says he, poor man, "for all you've done, an' all you would do, if you could." Poor old ooman, she come out, but Be'mont was gone, and she's gone now—a happier way. The last words he ever said to me was, "Thank ye kindly, Betty, but it's jest as if the sun 'ud never come agin for me." Well, sir, the night arter that thunderstorm I was speakin' on, the perliceman come up to me—he ain't on the beat now, an' I'm sorry, for he was a feelin' man s' far as a perliceman can have feelin's, an' it ain't so won'erful perlicemen ain't gen'rally feelin' men, consid'rin' how they gits treated—though they should make more 'lowance for poor critturs that gits shoved about by them great fellers that eats as much in a day as them they shoves about gits in a week—well, sir, the perliceman comes up to me, an' he says, "Betty, that poor cove's gone." "What poor cove?" says I. "The lame chap you used to give the breakfast to," says

he. "He was hangin' about here yisterday, an' looked disapp'inted when he couldn't find ye. The poor beggar looked as if he'd had nothin' to eat for a week. He went on to the bridge, an' two farmer fellows—joskins, anyhow—that looked as if they'd come by an early train, went by. The poor cove axed 'em for a copper. One on 'em began to unbutton his top-coat, but the t'other says, 'You ain't up to Lunnun ways—come on.' An' they went on, and the poor cove looked so despairin' that I'd ha' give him a copper myself if I'd had one in my pocket. 'Move on, my man, we can't allow no beggin',' I said, in course, but I hoped he'd be luckier next time. I'd scarce got to the next lamp-post before I heard a splash. Back I run—to the end o' the bridge I run, but I could see nothin' of the poor lame cove."

'That's what the perliceman told me, an' nothin's been ever heard o' poor Be'mont since, an' to my dyin' day I shall never forgive myself for not bein' ready to give the poor man his breakfast. He wanted to keep a home for his poor wife, poor chap, an' if it hadn't 'a' been for me, he might ha' done it. He'd ha' seen the sun come up agin—that mornin' anyhow, poor feller.'

I commend this little narrative to the notice of those who make Archbishop Whately's excellent general rule—Don't give to beggars in the street—a rule without exception.

XXI.

MOTHER MAHONY'S RECOMPENSE.



MADE Mother Mahony's acquaintance whilst I was staying at a little watering-place on the Sussex coast ; her cottage was a convenient resting-place after a walk along the shore. It stood almost on the beach. The South Downs would have swept to her very back door, if they had not pulled themselves up short in a tiny chalk cliff. In front was a little garden that boasted of a couple of monthly rose-bushes, two or three sweet-williams and stocks and wall-flowers, a patch of money-wort, a border of pink daisies with a frayed fringe of London pride, and a fine clump of Indian grass. Outside the little tarred garden-gate passed the sandy shore-road, and below that was the moist beach, pimpled with coiled worm-casts, and ribbed with long, low 'groynes', salt-candied, barnacled, and hung with black, podded seed-weed. Beyond spread the bright blue sea, with snowy gulls screaming and

circling over it, and black mackerel boats with sails like slabs of mildewed mahogany, cantering over the waters with a kind of heavy grace. In very fine weather a sun-spangled lavender film could be seen on the other side of the sea, and that was France, though it looked a good deal more like a happy ghostland than any country on which foot of flesh could fall. Mother Mahony's diamond-paned window—half of the lattice open, and a 'bowpot' of her old-fashioned flowers in a jug on the window-shelf—was a very pleasant lounging-place upon a glowing summer's day. She had a chair of state which she reserved for visitors—an old-fashioned affair with a high, carved back, panelled in the middle with a flabby pad of tarnished gilt green leather, and a cosy patchwork-covered cushion. *She* sat in a rush-bottomed chair propped up with a pillow, for she was very feeble, and troubled with a hacking cough.

In spite of her name, she was not an Irishwoman. She was the widow of a long-since deceased Irish coast-guard-man, once stationed in the neighbourhood. Tim Mahony was chief boatman, and had gone out in the station's cutter to the relief of a ship in distress. But the cutter was capsized herself, and had only reached land again bottom upwards. Some of her crew were astride on her, or clinging to her, as she was dashed broadside on the beach like a drifting log; but Tim Mahony was one of the drowned. So Mother Mahony, who was a fine young mother then, had to leave the snug little station-colony, with its low line of thatched white cot-

tages, shingled boat-shed, saucy-looking flagstaff, and long tarpaulin-shrouded gun. She took up her little Tim, and made a very short flight to the cottage in which she spent the rest of her life. She had a little pension—I do not know from what source—but it was not enough to support her without working, when she was well enough to work. Her profile—save that through lack of teeth the mouth had fallen in—gave a hint in her old age of the ‘fine woman’ she must have been in her young days; but it was a hint that needed a strong imagination to follow it up. In spite of her wrinkled parchment skin, however, Mother Mahony still possessed beauty—the venerable beauty of resigned old age. In strange contrast to her shrivelled face and wasted form and gentle spirit, two other occupants of her cottage moved about in it. One was a chubby, imperious baby-boy, a toddling two-year-old; the other was his mother, a very handsome young woman, who could not help looking handsome, although an unsleeping feud with Fortune had hardened her rich blue eyes with a frost-crust, and drawn her beautiful features into an expression of continued angry protest. Her feeling could be read even in the way in which she dressed. She put on her clothes as if there was nothing in the world worth making herself smart for now, and looped up her masses of golden-brown hair anyhow. Her little boy, however, was always kept as trim as a little lord. Tim Mahony the Third was the only creature for whom Maggie Comber, by courtesy Mahony, seemed to care. He was a fine little fellow,

but his mother was doing her worst to spoil him. She lavished foolish affection on him just as she had lavished it on his father, who had deserted her. Mother Mahony, who perhaps had spoilt *that* little Tim, and did not wish his son to follow in his steps, would sometimes gently check the child ; but if she did so, Maggie turned on her like a tigress, no matter who was in the cottage. Her general bearing towards the old woman was that of sullen gratitude—angry at having to acknowledge any reason for being grateful. The old woman had taken her and her baby in when otherwise they would have been homeless. So in an ungracious kind of way she did what she could to keep the home together, and to contribute to the old woman's comfort physically ; but Mother Mahony was mother to the man who had brought double shame to beautiful Maggie—made her an unmarried mother, and then wearied of her. Maggie, who had been used to hold her head high in her own little world, and who, whilst she neglected herself, was fully conscious of the beauty she eclipsed, visited the son's sins on the mother's head in a wearisome fugue of ill-temper, varied only by a crashing chorus of rage when Master Tim was crossed, however mildly. Mother Mahony's cottage, basking at the foot of the little chalk cliff between the green swelling downs and the blue swelling sea, looked an ideal abode of peace ; but I soon found that it was only another case of *Nulla fides fronti*. And yet there *was* peace in Mother Mahony's cottage—down at the bottom of her own heart, where it could not be ruffled by surface

storms. She believed that somehow, somewhen, and somewhere, God would make all things come right for those who gave themselves up to his will, instead of, as she said, fighting against it like chips against the tide. To hear that her boy had repented of his 'ways,' and to get Maggie to acknowledge God as a Father, instead of carping at Him as a Fate that had been specially cruel to herself, were the proofs of her creed that Mother Mahony earnestly craved. However long these might be deferred, her faith in her creed was fast and firm. So the old woman eschewed evil, did good, sought peace, and *had* it—had it in spite of poor Maggie's chronic ill-temper (which the old woman was too gentle, and vicariously conscience-stricken, even to think ungrateful), and had it, at last, in the very ways she wished, though perhaps in a manner that at first was, a bitter rind to a sweet fruit. Mother Mahony's ideal had been her 'Tim home again, and going to church with her and Maggie and little Tim—a dutiful son, and the fond husband of a happy, 'honest woman.' Little Tim would still be illegitimate, no doubt, but that wouldn't matter so much then. There was no 'money in the family,' and, of course, there would be such a brood of legitimate little Mahonys that the eldest brother's legal difference from the rest would soon be as much forgotten as his mother's 'misfortune.' But that was not the mode in which Mother Mahony was to be recompensed for her kindness to Maggie and little Tim, and her patient endurance of poor Maggie's bad temper.

One day I came to the back-door of the cottage, after a bracing walk over the thymy, sheep-dotted downs, with their sweeping mounds and basin-like hollows, and their shallow little chalk-pans palely blue, though, in their small way, they reflected the same heaven as faithfully as the deep, deep blue sea. I was, moralising the contrast and the likeness between the Downs ponds and the Channel, when, mounting a last little rise, I came almost upon the chimneys of Mother Mahony's cottage. They were handsome, twisted, brick chimneys—of the kind common in wood-cuts, which may still be really seen here and there in Sussex cottages—rising like petrified smoke-columns above mossy, weedy thatch, and ripe-red, leaden-purple brick and crumbling plaster, divided into diamonds, triangles, and parallelograms by lichen'd grey and brown timber beams. In that cottage, thought I, there are two hearts that are both far more like the sea than the chalk-pans in their depth; for Maggie *had* a deep heart, notwithstanding her peevishness, which is generally a symptom of a shallow one. It was not, *au ond*, the false position in which she was placed that caused her greatest griet; she missed the overflowing love her nature craved.

Getting no answer when I knocked at the open back-door, I walked into the little kitchen, and saw through the half-open doorway all the little family assembled in the tiny front room. They were too much pre-occupied to notice that any one had come into the house. A lady (who I afterwards learnt was the sister of the parish

clergyman) sat in the carved chair of state, reading something out of a little book that looked like a duodecimo New Testament. When I found that she was not reading the printed pages, but some lines written on the fly-leaf and the binding, I, of course, drew back out of hearing; but, before I went, I could not help glancing at those who were listening to her reading. Mother Mahony sat with her head drooped, and her wasted hand over her faded eyes. Tears were trickling down her yellow cheek. Fresh sorrow had plainly come to her, but the expression of her mouth showed that balm had oozed from the very shaft that wounded her. On the back of the old woman's chair leaned Maggie. The old expression was still upon her face—

‘I question things, and do not find
One that will answer to my mind;
And all the world appears unkind.’

But through this, like a bud out of bark, a look of interest was breaking that had pity and forgiveness in it. Little Tim sat sturdily on his mother's arm, frowning displeasure at the strange lady who had poached on his manor in making granny cry, and had caused him to be taken up from his toys.

I handled the little book afterwards (it *was* a New Testament), and read what was written in it. As well as I can remember, the words, partly in ink and partly in pencil, ran thus:—

‘Timothy Mahony. His book. Given by his mother, Jane Mahony, —, Sussex, October 14th, 183—.

'Sydney Infirmary, Macquarie Street, October 14th, 185—.—This is my birthday, and I know that I am going to die. Please some one send this to my poor mother when I am dead, Jane Mahony, —, Sussex, by the Preventive Station. Dear Mother,—Forgive me for all my badness. The wages of sin is death, and I am going to die. It is lonely lying here without a soul that knows me; but, dear mother, I have asked God to forgive me for Jesus Christ's sake, and so I am not alone now. I never did well, not in the States, nor in California, nor Port Phillip, nor here. This is their spring here, and it seems hard to have to die when everything is so bright. Out of my window I can see an English tree with fresh leaves on. Oh, dear mother, if I had minded your advice. But God's will be done. I can't help wishing, though, that I could kiss my own dear Margaret, and you, and the baby before I die. Where are they now? For my sake, dear mother, look after them. I behaved shameful bad to Maggie, but tell her I died loving her more than I ever did. And don't let the boy run wild like me. Tell him what it brought his father to. I can scarce believe sometimes that my sins are forgiven. Sick as I am, I've done nothing but be sorry for them, and anybody would be that. But I try to keep hold of Christ. Dear mother, forgive me, and ask Maggie to forgive me, and kiss her and the boy for me. If I could but come home again, how different I would treat her! But there is no hope of that now. Give Maggie this when you have read it, and ask her to give it to the

boy when he grows up, to be a warning to him. God bless her, and you, and the baby. I have been a bad son to you and a bad man to poor Maggie. I have nothing else to send. God bless you all. May we all meet in heaven. I have no right to get there; but Christ died even for folks as bad as me. Kiss baby, and my fond love to Maggie.—Your loving son,

‘TIMOTHY MAHONY.

‘Mrs Jane Mahony, —, Sussex.

‘Please forward this. There is a shilling in my waistcoat.’

The shilling had not been used for postage, but sent with the book to England. The clergyman who had attended poor Tim in his last illness found the Testament under his pillow when he was dead, and had forwarded it, together with the coin—thinking it might be valued as a keepsake—under cover to the — clergyman. Maggie bored a hole in the shilling, and wore it, like a locket, in her breast. She put on widow’s weeds for the man that had ruined her, and mourned for him as if he had been indeed her husband. Her sorrow softened her. She ceased to dwell upon her shame when she knew that Tim had died full of remorseful love for her. Almost all her hardness melted away in the gush of her grief, like ice in a spring-loosened stream. She became a daughter to Mother Mahony, and in the Martinmas summer of her affection the old woman seemed to get a new lease of life.

She could never keep the tears out of her dim old eyes when she spoke of her poor boy 'dying all alone in them foreign parts;' but a gleam that seemed to dry the tears up, like April sunshine on April rain-drops, played on her face as she added, 'But I thank the Lord who hears and answers prayer, there was hope in his death, there was hope in his death, dear boy.'

The last time I saw little Tim was one Sunday afternoon. He had learned to read by that time, and was sitting on a little three-legged stool, leaning against his grandmother's knee, and making a desk of his mother's, as he read out to them a chapter of St. Luke from the little duodecimo. He was allowed to have this as a special treat on Sundays; but his mother had jealously hidden, from all eyes but her own, his father's confession beneath the sealed brown-paper cover of the book. Both Mother Mahony and Maggie had tears in their eyes when I went into the cottage on that Sunday afternoon, but tears that had no bitterness in them. It was the parable of the Prodigal Son that little Tim was reading.

XXII.

A LITTLE HEROINE.



IT was at my publishers' that I first saw my little heroine—a slim, threadbare damsel of barely thirteen, with the frail, yellowly-translucent, easily-drooping look of a balsam. It was magazine day, and the little maiden was rather startled by the bustle of the outer office. She was plainly a brave, business-like little body, however, and edging her way to the counter through the crowd of messengers who were squeezing up for, or away with, the piles of *Good Words* and *Sunday Magazine*, she thus addressed one of the clerks, in a tone, if I may make use of an apparent paradox, of tremulous *aplomb*.

‘If you please, sir, I wish to see the Firm.’

‘The Firm’ was first pronounced to be invisible, but the little girl quietly insisted that it must be visible to her. The Firm was next said to be particularly engaged.

‘I will wait, then,’ answered the little maiden, and,

backing out of the throng, she seated herself on a bench against the wall, with determination to keep on sitting there—like Theseus, till she did see the Firm—‘writ large’ on her wan, wistful, little face.

The clerk was a good-natured fellow. He noticed her wistful look, and asked whether he could take in any message for her.

‘Be kind enough to say, sir, that I have called upon important *business*,’ the damsel replied impressively.

With this somewhat vague intimation, the clerk disappeared in the penetralia of the office. Presently he returned to say that the Firm could favour the little business woman with precisely a couple of minutes, and that he was to show her in. By-and-by she came out beaming; and making an old-fashionedly polite bow to her guide as she passed him at the counter, she tripped blithely out into the street.

When it came to my turn to be closeted with the Firm, I learnt the little maiden’s business. She was canvassing personally to get her mother placed on the pension-list of one of the Hospitals for Incurables, and had called to solicit the Firm’s votes and interest. The Firm had been very much amused by the business-like manner in which the earnest little thing managing the matter—time of election, number of votes which a subscription carried—everything she had got up completely. She was even up to the system of exchanging votes. When any one to whom she applied had not a vote for what she called ‘*my* hospital,’ but had one for

another charity, she would beg *that*, to exchange with any subscriber to the hospital who might be disinclined to give her his vote without such consideration. All this she had explained to the Firm with precocious precision; and I could not help sharing the interest which the Firm took in her. In one way and another I got to hear of the course and the issue of her canvassing adventures, and will now relate them.

Agnes, when I first made her acquaintance, was lodging with her widowed mother in a street leading out of the East-India Road. The father had been a druggist somewhere in that neighbourhood, but had left his wife and child literally nothing. The widow—Mrs Smith, I will call her for convenience' sake—had no friends to help her, and very little health and strength to enable her to earn a living for herself and her baby. Until Agnes was twelve years old, however, she had managed somehow to rub on by keeping a little day-school. But then, although she was by no means an old woman, her sight had suddenly failed, and in spite of what could be done for her at the Moorfields Ophthalmic Hospital, she had never recovered it. She was not absolutely blind, but saw everything in a haze, which was almost more painful than total darkness; and this mist, the doctors told her, would probably deepen gradually until she entirely lost her eyesight. The little school had to be given up, and Mrs Smith went with her daughter to lodge in the street I have mentioned. The mistress of the house was a peculiar woman, who had a queer habit of speaking of

her husband as 'Mine,' and of taking the merest stranger into her confidence.

When first I called upon Agnes, the landlady and her slavey were loudly discussing in the passage a tax-paper that had just been left. 'Betty,' screamed the landlady, 'you run after the man this minute. Like his impidence, indeed ! Queen's Taxes ! Does he know what it cost to keep this house together ? An' me faggin' myself off my legs, because *you* ain't a mite o' use, and Mine as hard-workin' a man as you'll find this side o' the river, or tother either. You run after the man this minute, Betty, an' tell him not to try it on with his Queen's Taxes here. I ain't a-goin' to pay 'em, an' that's flat. You tell him we won't have none of his cheatin' *here*.'

When Betty returned from her chase of the tax-collector, with a smirkingly-sulky 'Please'm, •he says it's all right, and you'd better pay, or else you'll be *made*,' the poor landlady became almost hysterical. 'Betty,' she shrieked, turning to the servant and myself alternately, 'don't you tell your master when he comes in. Mine'll go out o' his mind, sir. Queen's Taxes ! He shall have his night's rest, poor dear, an' I'll tell him in the mornin' when he's fresh to bear it. An' him slavin' as he do, an' me a-worryin' myself into my grave to keep a roof over our heads, with them lodgers eatin' us out o' house an' home. No, sir, I don't mean them as you've come to see. *They* keeps theirselves, poor dears. But there's that sailor feller allus a grumblin' because there ain't enough, he says ; an' the tailor chap eats butter as if it growed on

bushes. An' then we must pay Queen's Taxes! Ain't *she* a woman, an' ain't *I* a woman, I should like to know? Salmon would become my table as much as hern, but, bless ye, *I* can't git salmon. *I've* got to pay Queen's Taxes—to pay for her salmon, an' carriages, and thinx. What's she want with a lot o' houses, an' make poor folks pay for 'em? I should be ashamed to do such a thing, if I was one as called myself a Queen, *I* should. What are you starin' for there, Betty? You go up an' tell Mrs Smith there's somebody wantin' to see her daughter. You should on'y have knocked twice, sir, if you wanted the second floor back. *Queen's Taxes!* The country's comin' to somethin' now. I must hide this thing away somewheres. Mine 'll go out o' his mind if he ketches sight on it.'

Agnes came tripping down the stairs, and led me into the grassy back-yard, where poor Mrs Smith was basking in the sunlight, on a chair propped against a flagstaff, almost as high as the house. Some hinted disparagement of the landlady, which escaped me in course of conversation, brought them both out warmly in her defence. Greedy vulgarian though she seemed, she had been almost delicately kind to them. A grand-daughter of the landlady's, of whom she was very fond, had been one of Mrs Smith's pupils. Little Fanny had been very fond of Mrs Smith, and Agnes also, and they had constantly visited her in her last illness. Accordingly, when Mrs Smith was obliged to break up her humble home, the landlady had offered the widow the use of her second

floor back, with an intimation that Mine could not afford to go without the rent, but that it might be paid 'when convenient;' and, although an infirm, hard-struggling woman, she had exerted herself to procure for Agnes the needlework by which the brave little girl 'supported' her mother and herself: although, too, the landlady grudged her sailor-lodger his bread and her tailor-lodger his butter, she sometimes, I found, supplemented the scanty commissariat of her female lodgers who 'kept themselves.' Agnes laughed heartily when she talked about 'Mine;' but '*That* they have, mamma,' she said earnestly, when Mrs Smith gratefully remarked that both Mine and his wife had been kind friends to them.

When I got into the passage again, on my way out, the landlady was growling, 'Drat those children—they're on my pales agin. Bring me a bucket o' water, Betty,' she added, in a stage-whisper. 'Please to stand back a bit, sir, not to scare 'em,' she then said to me, as she stealthily opened the front door. 'No, there's on'y two up yet,' she next soliloquised. 'I won't waste the water. *Now* they shall have it.' She had waited until half-a-dozen youngsters had mounted her palings, and were vigorously kicking them, meanwhile cheerfully chanting, 'Haul away the bowline—the bowline—haul!' 'There, you've got it now!' she shouted, as she rushed out, and adroitly cleared off the whole line with a drenching shot. 'It Mine's got to pay Queen's Taxes, he shan't have his house pulled about when he's away, by a lot o' young wagabones. What are you a-larfin' tor, Miss Agnes?'

Agnes certainly was laughing most heartily, and I could not help joining her, although, if I had seen the landlady's performance before I had been enlightened as to her character, I might have been inclined to put it down as an additional proof that she was a cross-grained old vixen.

I chanced to see in one of the papers the list of successful candidates for the 'Incurable' pensions that year—Mrs Smith's name was not included in it. I felt sorry for her disappointment, and my brave little friend's, and then I forgot all about the matter, as we are too apt to forget things in this overgrown London. I was reminded of Agnes when next year I again saw a stale list without Mrs Smith's name in it. Happening to be in Broad Street at the time, I went to the station, took a ticket for Poplar, and found my way once more to the East-India Road. 'Oh, you're the gent as called once afore,' said the landlady, in answer to my inquiries. 'I thought p'raps you might ha' done somethin' for 'em—on'y, ye see, you *didn't*. That's left for sich as Mine an' me to do. An' we don't grudge it, though it's hard on hard-workin' folks like us to have to keep them as 'don't belong to us. Agnes, poor dear, is in hospital agin. Last year, when Mrs Smith didn't get what Agnes was trying for, the poor gal took it to heart uncommon. She'd been buildin' her hopes on it, ye see, an' it were dis'eartenin' when she'd been traipsin' about, when her work was done—an' givin' up her work, poor dear—to see folks as might ha' done somethin' for her, an' comin'

back so pleased when they'd spoke her fair. I don't think much o' them charities as wants votes to get ye in. Them as has fewest friends is the ones as needs 'em most, an' them's the ones as can't git 'em. Poor little Agnes! She took to her bed about a fortnit after the 'lection, as they calls it, 'cos next to nobody's 'lected seems to me. Mine spoke to the gen'leman at the yard where Mine works, an' he give her a letter for the London Hospital. I went to see here there, *I* did, an I took her mother with me. "Mrs Sprigg," says she to me, when she went away in the cab Mine paid for, "you'll take care of my mar, won't ye? I'll pay you some day, when I'm strong agin." An' so she will, if she can, if she ever do git better, I'll take my davy o' that, poor dear. Well, out she come agin, and to work she went agin, as if her fingers were made o' iron, an' there was no tirin' out her poor little feet, trottin' about *canwassin'*, as she called it. But before last 'lection came, she were in hospital agin, dead beat. Mine got her in, though he was half afeared to ask twice runnin', so close like. I've been to see her, but I hain't taken Mrs Smith yet. Poor Agnes don't know but what she's in instead o' left on my hands. Though I won't complain. She do what she can, poor dear, though she hain't been much used to do anythin'; let alone her bein' three parts blind. I'd like to git the rent of her room, me a-slavin' and Mine a-slavin', but Agnes 'll make it square, if she's the chance, poor little gal; an' if she can't, God 'll make it up to us somehow, I s'pose. I allus had a likin' for

religion ; and if He don't, it's pleasant to have done it—so what's the use of talkin' as if it worn't? They was both on 'em as kind as kind could be to my little Fanny, an' I'm a mother, though my Sam don't treat me as sich. Where he got it from, I can't make out, for Mine oodn't hurt a fly, let alone the wife o' his buzzum.'

Agnes was aware of her mother's second failure when I called upon her in the long range of black and blackening brick, whose inside quiet, cleanliness, and comfort, sombre as it looks outside, makes it an oasis in the bustling, brawling wilderness of the Whitechapel Road. The brave little woman had not lost heart, however. As she lay upon her numbered bed, she was devising fresh canvassing routes, and as soon as she got out she started on them as hopefully as ever.

Twice when I called in the East-India Road Agnes was away from home. 'She's out traipsin' again,' said Mrs Sprigg on one of these occasions. 'An' it's a shame, I say, that she should have to go so far to git so little. Why don't some o' the fine folks she calls on give her the money out o' hand, an' have done with it? 'Twouldn't be so much to them as 'tis to Mine to pay her railway fare, an' it's horfen as Mine does that, sir, though sixpence is sixpence to hard-workin' folks.'

This year, just after the 'Incurable' election, I again chanced to meet Agnes at 56, Ludgate Hill. She was proudly piloting her mother through the outer office to the penetralia. The little canvasser's patient courage at last had conquered. The £20 per annum was secured

for life. It does not sound much, but Agnes measured it by the trouble she had had to get it, and the comforts it would purchase for her mother. With £20 a-year certain to fall back upon, they were comparatively wealthy now, in her opinion. There was something sure for her mamma, at any rate, whatever might happen to her. But, stimulated by the delicious wine of success, and supported by the bread—however humble a crust—of certainty, Agnes had no more dread of disabling illness for herself now. She felt as if she could work for ever, and would prosper in everything. Her pale face was flushed with triumph as she led her groping mother into the presence of the Firm, on whom they had called in their round of thanksgiving visits.

‘And “Mine” is going to take Mrs Sprigg and mamma and me to the North Woolwich Gardens next Monday, because he says I’m “a good-plucked’un,”’ Agnes told me, laughing with girlish glee, as I bade her good-bye. ‘They’re kind people,’ she added more gravely. ‘They’re both going to church with us next Sunday, though they’re Dissenters, because mamma is going to return thanks. She wanted me to put “for a loving daughter” as well as “unexpected mercy” in the note to the clergyman; but I told mamma that would sound as if she was astonished that she *had* a daughter who was fond of her. I don’t quite like the “unexpected,” either. I always expected it; and why shouldn’t I, when God is so good, and has made such a quantity of kind people?’

XXIII.

A PEEP INTO A GARRET.



HERE are persons of a sociable, sympathetic turn of mind who dread grey hairs more than the grave ; and the isolation which old age brings with it is certainly not an alluring prospect. Those who remembered what they remember, felt as they feel, thought as they think, gradually depart, and the old are left alone, out of *rapport* with the new world that has grown up around them. Even if still surrounded with troops of friends, the friends are not of their generation ; this world has still a future for them, and therefore they are apt to smile at the memories of the old folks, and to think themselves very good-natured in humouring as they do the old folks' antiquated fancies. But 'the poor make no new friends,' and often experience a still drearier loneliness as *they* grow old, so far as human fellowship is concerned. They are almost forgotten in the holes into which they have crept to die ;

and when, now and then, they creep out again into the busy world, they have a very ghost-like look. They don't belong to the bustling throng they feebly thread; they have made no mark in the world—utterly failed to win fame or fortune, and have no chance of doing so now. Pre-occupied eyes, accordingly, pass over them with as little notice as if they were mere shadows, or glance at them for a moment with a look of semi-contemptuous, semi-puzzled dislike. 'How do people come to be so poor in such a money-making world as this? And when they are so poor, why don't they die out of the world, instead of crossing respectable people's paths, and making them feel uncomfortable?' That is what the cold, shrinking look seems to say. It is no wonder, I think, that so many of the aged poor sour in their solitude: the wonder to me is, that so many of them should keep their milk of human kindness sweet, and bear their want so patiently. It is hard work loving kindred who take no notice of one; and being heroic, when there is nobody to praise you if you succeed, or to care a penny if you fail. It is of two poor old women, of very different dispositions, chance-drifted into the same *magna-civitas magna-solitudo* loneliness, a London garret—that I am about to write.

From the back of my house I can see a row of dim red-brick old houses, crowded up and blinking behind a block of more modern drab brick. Where the newer houses stand there were once, I suppose, white rails and grass and trees, pleasantly screening the old

from the road; but now their only look-out in front is on the dreary back-yards, and drying linen, and bulging bath-rooms, and untidy back-windows of the usurpers of their roadside grass-plats. The only access to the old houses is through an archway in the new block, and the path that passes them, and ends in a dead wall, is overshadowed by the back-yards' boundary. There is an almost constant rumble of traffic in the great thoroughfare outside, but, built in behind as well as in front, the old houses, which must have been a cosy row of private residences once, seem quite shouldered out of the world. As are the tenements, so are the tenants. All the adults have a *worsted* look. The little trades they carry on in their own houses are of the most uncertain and shadowy description: if they have work elsewhere they seem, from the numbers that idle about aimlessly at intervals, to be ever and anon thrown out of work. At no time do they appear to be flush of money. Every room in the row is crowded—each chamber, generally speaking, being a separate home, and sometimes a joint home; but it is not a drunken, noisy neighbourhood. Its pale, pinched occupants are glad enough to work when other people are taking holiday, and take doleful, silent holiday when other people are at work. Just within the archway opens the dark side-entrance to a pawnbroker's. It is conveniently placed for the inhabitants of the row. Their shoulder-rubbings have made the three golden balls painted on the doorposts as dim and dingy

as the world, which seems so bright a globe to many, must appear to them. Some one or other of them is almost always slipping into the dark doorway with something or other covered up from sight. Furniture, flat-irons, tools, boots, flannel petticoats, Sunday gowns—almost everything they possess, which is hypothecable—they have so often hypothecated, that, when they get them back they must feel that they only enjoy a precarious usufruct of them, and that the pawnbroker is the real proprietor. The narrow flagged pathway in front of the houses swarms with ragged, yellow-faced children, and the dirty step of almost every open doorway holds a resting row of tiny nursemaids, some of them very little bigger than the babies which they lug about like kittens. The children are the only noisy people about the place, and though, like other children better off, they wrangle a good deal over their play, as well as laugh, it is a relief to find in that depressed place any sign of life vigorous and self-satisfied enough to venture to be loud—to think that, at any rate, the little ones have a *chance* of doing better than their parents have done, poor as that chance may be.

Through often looking down into the row—Bolingbroke Row, let us call it (it has an aristocratic name like that)—I have got to learn its ways, and take an individual interest in its inhabitants. It has a very fluctuating population. Little eddies of shabby life are ever ebbing and flowing there. A good many of the rooms in Bolingbroke Row, though miserable enough now, are

large, and their tenants cease to be able to pay the rent. Accordingly they drag their squalid household goods, and pathetic little household gods, down the broad, shallow staircases, push, and pull, and carry them along the flagged pathway, to the hand-truck or the donkey-cart that is waiting at the end, and trudge out with it under the archway to seek another refuge and patronise another pawnbroker.* Rooms do not remain long empty in Bolingbroke Row, although its rents are exorbitant. There are too many poor people in the neighbourhood anxious to get a home of any kind. Fresh tenants generally come in on the same day—to go out similarly in their turn; and so the dreary wheel rolls round. Of course, however, there are some ‘old residents’ in the Row. One white-haired old woman in faded black—still neat-looking, in spite of its darned rustiness—whom I had frequently seen coming out of the door of the farther-end house, excited my special interest, and I resolved at last to learn something about her. I ascertained her name from one of the Row’s nursemaids, who was airing her charge at the mouth of the archway (and almost falling on her nose as she made the baby play bo-peep round the corner with the passing ’buses), and was told also that the old woman, who had stopped to chuck the baby under the chin as she went by, lived with another old woman at the top of No. 17.

A few evenings afterwards, I found my way to No. 17, and mounted its broad, dirty, broken balustraded staircase—curiously stared at by those I passed upon it, and

by other tenants looking out through their open doorways. When I reached what I thought was the top landing, I knocked at random at one of the doors which gave on it, but found that I had to mount another flight—a short, quite dark, crooked little flight, which led to the garrets. There had originally been four garrets, two in front and two behind, with a passage between; but each had been halved, and, therefore, I had eight doors to choose from. A candle that had been left burning outside one of them threw its dim light along the passage. At last I found my two old women. It was a cold night, and they had a fire—but such a little one: a sleepy inch or two of red between three small stony bits of coal. They were trying to fancy that they were warming their poor old knees over it as they sat knitting in the dusk. When I went in, my old woman, Hannah Brown, lighted the bit of candle in the tin candlestick that stood upon the mantel-shelf, and offered me her chair—there was no spare one: but I found a seat upon a box. That mangy old hair trunk, a mouldy brown leather portmanteau, the two chairs, a bed upon the floor, quilted with a mouse-coloured ‘charity-blanket,’ a little kettle, and a little crockery, &c., on a shelf in an angle of the garret, formed almost the whole of the furniture.

Both of the old women were very thin, and had a lizard look about their shrivelled necks, but Hannah Brown was a cheerful, uncomplaining old body, whilst her companion, introduced as Mrs Gusterson, had a half-

sour, half-savage expression. For one thing, rheumatic twinges were racking her poor old quarter-clad shoulders.

‘I hope you won’t think that I am intruding,’ I said to her. ‘I had heard about you and Mrs Brown, and I wanted to hear something more about you.’

‘We hain’t so many wisiters that we need be per-tic’lar,’ was Mrs Gusterson’s somewhat ungracious reply. ‘I suppose ye’re a parson, or do you belong to the parish?’

‘At any rate, I have not called as a parson—you are just outside my parish. I am a neighbour, and have come to pay a neighbourly visit.’

‘You’ve been a long time coming, then, and I don’t suppose you’ll be in a hurry to come agin.’

‘That depends on whether you will let me.’

‘Oh, you’re free to come or stay away, for what I care.’

‘She don’t mean it, sir,’ interposed Mrs Brown, ‘and I’m sure we’re much obliged to you for coming. Mrs Gusterson is werry bad with the roomatics—ain’t ye, Emmer?’

‘Speak for yourself, Mrs Brown,’ was Emma’s response.

The production of a little parcel—as affording some intelligible reason for my coming—partially mollified Mrs Gusterson; and, whilst she was examining the contents, I got into conversation with Mrs Brown.

‘You have been living here for a year and more, I think.’

‘Two year, sir, and so has Emmer. We took the room betwixt us. We’ve both a little from the parish.’

‘But I should a-had to go into the House, if it hadn’t been for her,’ angrily interjected Mrs Gusterson. ‘I’d got no sticks.’

‘I suppose you have known each other a long time.’

‘No, we hain’t. I never set eyes on her, to my knowledge, till a day or two before we come here: But she would make me come, and a rare plague I’ve been to her. She don’t look half so strong as me, but my roomatics pulls me down, and she’ve had to nuss me.’

‘It’s a great comfort,’ went on Mrs Brown, as if repeating an axiom, ‘to have a kind, well-conducted woman like Mrs Gusterson livin’ with me. We works together, and that helps to pay the rent; and then she’s good company.’

‘What work do you do?’

‘We knit stockings, and muffetees, and things like that. Sometimes we get orders, and sometimes we take them out to sell.’

‘*You* take them, Hanner,’ growled Mrs Gusterson.

‘But, surely, you can’t make a living in that way?’

‘We couldn’t do, sir, if it wasn’t for what we get from the parish——’

‘And *that’s* a fat lot,’ scornfully snorted the other old woman.

‘But this and that together,’ went on Hannah, ‘we manage somehow to rub on. There’s folks worse off

than we are, poor souls. Some of our regular customers give 'andsome prices.'

'Because the things wears better than what they could get from the shops,' interjected Mrs Gusterson; 'and, Hanner, you can't deny that most on 'em is screws; an' sometimes you don't sell a thing when you've been traipsing about all day.'

'Well, I try to do my best, Emmer. Anyhow, sir, we've managed to pay our rent, thank God.'

'Does anybody ever call on you?'

'There was a lady come last winter, and give us a trac', Mrs Gusterson contemptuously answered.

'Emmer ain't herself to-night,' Mrs Brown anxiously explained. 'She do suffer dreadful, poor dear. There was folks in the Row worse off than we was then, and I told the lady so. She 'adn't much to give, and Emmer wouldn't have taken the money, either, out of the mouths of them that wanted it worse than us. She was a kind, sweet young lady. It was as good as a fire to have her in the room, and she *did* send us half-a-hundred, you know, Emmer.'

'What church do you go to?'

'Emmer can't go out, poor dear——'

'And Emmer wouldn't if she could,' sneered Mrs Gusterson. 'What's the good o' goin' to church when you're poor? You only get shoved about and looked down on. A lot of fine folks with their smart clothes, and their smart prayer-books, settin' on cushions, and you a-settin' on them cold, hard benches.'

‘Well, Emmer,’ said Mrs Brown, with a laugh, ‘I’ve got a seat right agin’ the stove. But what do it matter,’ she added seriously, ‘whether you’re rich or poor when you’re in church? Everybody has got the same God, and Christ didn’t die for one more than another. Poor folks, I fancy, is best off at church. There’s so much about them in the Bible. P’raps heaven don’t seem so nice to them that have plenty of money, as it do to us. They’ve got so many things to leave behind them when they die. And yet I can’t think that. What’s the things rich folk has got to them you read about in Revelation? I like to hear that read out in church, sir—about the holy city and the voice of many waters. Seems as if the organ should be playing all the while. “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.” That’s the beautifullest book in the Bible, I think, sir.’

As the old woman quavered the noble words which have comforted myriads of the down-stricken and down-trodden, with as near an approach to clerical tone as her piping voice could simulate, she hugged herself enjoyingly as if the scanty fire had suddenly burst out into yule-log blaze; and even Mrs Gusterson looked up with a gleam of hopeful light glancing over her dreary eyes. But Mrs Gusterson soon relapsed into grumpy gloom.

‘Yes, that sounds werry nice,’ she said. ‘I wish I

could say off Scriptur' like that. But we've got to live now, you know, Hanner.'

'Well, ain't we livin' now, Emmer?' was Mrs Brown's rejoinder, 'and if dyin' means goin' to that, I don't see why you and me need fret ourselves.'

From the disjointed autobiographical reminiscences which I afterwards managed to elicit from the two old women, I gathered that Mrs Brown had had far more than Mrs Gusterson to damp her spirits. The latter had never had the care which a poor woman's family brings upon her, and up to a very late period of her life had been in good practice as a charwoman. She spoke with regretful pride of the gin and beer she used to get, just as more aristocratical 'reduced gentlewomen' speak of the mansions they have been obliged to give up, and the carriages they once rode in. Mrs Brown, on the other hand, had had to fend for others as well as herself from the time she was eighteen. She had married then—a husband who thrashed her before their married life was brought to a close by his tumbling drunk off a scaffold. She was left with a large family, some of whom were sickly, whilst others of them ran wild. In spite of her slaving for her children, she had outlived them all. In her old age, she was left to make a fight for a living, without any human familiar except the crusty old woman whom their common loneliness, and her wish to be of some good to somebody, had led her, as it were, to adopt. But old Hannah had faith in a Friend whose close affection makes the warmest human relationship

seem cold ; she had hope of reaching the beautiful city she was so fond of reading about in Revelation ; and so she lived in cheerful charity just under the leaking roof of No. 17, Bolingbroke Row.

She does not live there now ; or Mrs Gusterson either. Mrs Brown died a few weeks after she had knitted me half-a-dozen pairs of socks ; and, in spite of her rheumatism, Mrs Gusterson insisted on hobbling after her old room-mate to the grave, and took fresh cold upon its brink which soon brought her back to her own. There is no lack of such old women, however, still left in London to be looked after.

XXIV.

QUITE ALONE.

LIFE ! What a different meaning that word has to different people ! After all, the truis-matic fact that all people, whilst they live, must breathe is almost the only common attribute of their lives. It is about another lonely old woman's life that I am about to tell. At the risk of giving some good-natured critic a tempting chance of quoting for the ten-thousandth time 'a fellow-feeling, makes one wondrous kind,' I must say that I pity from the bottom of my heart those poor old women. Whether they have struggled all their lives, or whether they have been in prosperous, or comparatively prosperous, circumstances all their lives, or whether they have 'had reverses,' they seem, as a rule, to have a far harder lot than old men under similar circumstances. They get shelved in general esteem far earlier and more completely. Even when an old woman lacks no bodily comfort, unless she be a very exceptional old woman, or it be necessary

to propitiate her for interested purposes, she cannot help feeling, I should say, that her belongings, however 'kind' they may be, virtually ignore her as a reasoning being. Grandmamma may be humoured, but she can see that any recognition of the fact that she may possibly have a will of her own is a very transparent sham on the part of the younger generations that have taken the management of her affairs as well as their own into their own hands, quite heedless at heart as to what may be her opinion of their usurpation. And sometimes they impose their often selfish dictation upon grandmamma without paying her the poor compliment of humouring her—bluntly order her to fall into the arrangements they had made for their own convenience, without even pretending to have had any regard for hers. Old men sometimes get deposed in this way, but far fewer of them; and then only when they are far more dependent and superannuated than the grandmammams I am talking of. It is, I think, both absurd and cowardly to use 'old woman' as a term of contempt in the sweeping way we do. A few old women have an almost fiendish *force* of character, and a raven-like aptitude for spying out and pouncing on sorely-weak points, that would make most of the contemners of old women look very small, if they were brought into collision with, or under the scrutiny of, these specimens of the despised sisterhood. Some old women, no doubt, are very silly, very fussy, very garrulous, very feebly spiteful; but so are some old men, a good many old men—and a good many middle-aged men, and young

men, too—a good many middle-aged and young women also. For my part, I think that old women, as a generation, could compare on very favourable terms with the generations that affect to look down on them, in all points except physical force and fleshiness. And even in respect of ‘looks,’ I am not sure that the old ladies would not, as a body, get the best of it. If there are hideous old ‘beauties’ who fancy they are beauties still, are there not young women and young men—quite as vain as the young women—who fancy themselves Venuses and Adonises, but who are, always were, and always will be ugly, until they are wreathed, in the beautiful Welsh phrase, with ‘the blossoms of the grave’—that is, if they have sense enough not to hide their white hair under puffy fronts that impose on nobody, or dye it an equally non-deceiving greenish purple? What right, moreover, has a pig-eyed porcinely configured paterfamilias, or a beef-fleshed, though certainly not ‘ox-eyed,’ materfamilias, to turn up the nose at the ‘looks’ of the old woman that may sometimes be seen—an old woman as beautiful as an autumn sunset, when the leaves are flecked with the first snows of winter?

I scarcely know, however, how my general defence of old women has led me on to talk of old women’s beauty just now. There was no physical beauty in the old woman of whom I am about to write. Indeed, it was her hard angular face that drew my attention to her. I am wrong though—it was the sad, dreamy expression on that hard, angular face at the time I first saw it.

One Sunday evening in summer I was wandering, quite lost, in a warren of London lanes, courts, and blind alleys. The lanes—save that the figure is too frolicsome for the doleful locality—seemed to have been laid out by magnifying the irregular circles made by a kitten running after its own tail. Once in them it was almost impossible for an unguided stranger to get out of their intersecting, wavy, and jagged curves, unless he turned under low archways, or through clefts between houses—so narrow that it was necessary to sidle through them,—to be brought up short by the dead wall of a *cul de sac*, or to lose himself once more in a Chinese puzzle of courts within courts. After the bewilderment of those inosculating nests of courts, it was almost a relief to discover from some often-passed landmark that one had got out again in the comparatively plain-sailing of the round-abouting lanes. They crossed like snakes lying one over another with their tails in their mouths, but still it was easier in them than it was in the courts to reason that one must eventually emerge into some familiar street or road. Cheapside, Oxford Street, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, the Borough High Street, New Cut, impress country people and foreigners with a forcible idea of the vast population of London, owing to their throngs of passengers; but a Londoner, I think, is more likely to be impressed by it if he turns into such a maze as I have described—one with which he is not familiar. He can find scores of them by just turning to the right or left out of thoroughfares he has known by heart from boyhood.

He will be startled at any time, but especially on a Sunday night, to find spaces which on the map look like very small blocks of untraversable building, as bored and honeycombed as sea-wormed wreck, and crammed with squalid people squatting everywhere like a swarm of Egyptian frogs. .

Whilst I was wandering about in the warren I have described, the bells of a church at some little distance pealed out. They were a saddening rather than a soothing sound, because it was so easy to note that their sweet Sabbath song went home to the hearts of scarcely any of the people around me. The tired faces looked no easier, the stolid faces looked none the more mobile, the savage faces looked no softer, the shallow frivolous faces were mellowed by no ennobling shade of seriousness, the besotted faces continued bestial. The sound of pealing (not ding-donging) church bells is sweet *per se*, and sweetly suggestive, wherever it may be heard, but it seems to me especially sweet—at any rate, in the latter sense—when it peals over the grimy roofs and grotesque chimney-pots of a poor quarter in a great city. It sounds as if a chorus of angels were singing for the consolation of the city's strugglers, 'There *is* peace to be obtained on earth—there is everlasting peace, there is joy whose everlasting jubilation will never flag, will never cloy, hereafter.'

But that was not the interpretation which the people in my warren put upon the Sunday evening peal. So far as appearances went, they put no interpretation whatever upon it. They simply disregarded it, because it was

nothing to *them*—just as the oaths and other foul language flying about were nothing to them, except when *they* chanced to be the recipients or bandiers of them. The old woman to whom I allude was the only exception. The peal of bells somehow made me look up, and I saw a face that fixed my eyes. It was hard and angular, as I have said, but a stream of sunshine, not strong enough to dazzle, falling upon it, I could see every line of it. It was not quite emancipated from the influence of its doleful surroundings, but as the haggard old woman leaned out of her little window—a window opening on the black, battered tiles, and patched with paper, rags, and an old hat—and listened to the evening bells, the memory of a pleasant past, so distant that it had become almost a dream to her,—the anticipation of rest and happiness for ever, which surely she would not have much longer to wait for, so swept over her sunlit rugged countenance that it was, as it were, the face of an angel in comparison with the faces above which it looked out.

Soon afterwards I learnt that old woman's history. It made me feel more than I had ever felt before the loneliness of London life. It also made me see more vividly than I had ever seen before that—however the fact may be explained—a belief in Christ does give real comfort and courage when, without such a belief, the wretched would be utterly wretched, the weary worsted in life's struggle would walk into the water, or lie down and die in their foodless garrets or the first quiet street-corner they could find.

This old woman, the almost starving tenant of a bare room in a London slum, was the eldest daughter of a Northamptonshire land-agent, a well-to-do man, who managed two or three important estates in different parts of the country, and had besides property of his own. He had a handsome old house overlooking the market-square in Northampton, and his daughters were brought up in almost luxurious comfort, and taught, in consideration of the intercourse which their father had with 'the landed gentry,' and of his owning a little land himself, to look down somewhat on the daughters of even the most prosperous tradesfolk in the Drapery, Northampton's Regent Street. When the old woman (whom I will henceforth call Miss Nene) found that I knew a little about Northampton, she brightened up, and began to talk about the old town she had not seen for nearly fifty years.

'Ah, yes, sir,' she said, 'I remember the Race-course well enough. My sisters were very pretty, and the Hunt gentlemen made so much of them at the race ball that the other girls were quite jealous. You wouldn't think that I had ever dressed in fine clothes and gone to balls, would you, sir? But we held our heads high then. If any one had told me that I should ever be as I am now, I should have thought him raving mad. It never entered my head that I could ever have to wear rags, and go without food and fire, and be looked down on even by the beggars. But it's God's will, and I won't murmur. Is that old house by Newland still standing, sir—the one

with the shields in front? There used to be some Welsh words cut on it that I've heard meant this—"Without God, without everything; God, and enough." And I've learnt that lesson, I bless His name.'

The youngest sisters married 'warm men,' the mother died, Miss Nene was left to keep her father's house. Although now an old maid, she was a 'highly respectable' old maid, with money coming to her on her father's death, and, therefore, was still a personage of some importance to her neighbours, brothers-in-law, and nephews and nieces.

In those days hard drinking unfortunately was so prevalent amongst her father's 'patrons, the landed gentry whom she had been taught to look upon as only a little lower than the angels, that she did not consider the respectability of her family at all impaired by the fact that her father went to bed drunk two or three times every week. When, however, he began to drink hard in the daytime, so as to incapacitate himself for business, even those who were willing to be his boon companions at what they called 'decent hours' began to shake their heads. Nene drank himself to death, and when his affairs were looked into, it was found that so far from having any money to leave his children, he had died in debt to his employers.

The old home was broken up, and Miss Nene had to find another for herself as best she could. 'I shouldn't have minded that so much,' she said, 'though I could not help thinking it hard that neither of my brothers-in-law

would let me come to them, not even for a week. They were disappointed, you see, at not having got what they had expected from father, and, of course, they knew I'd nothing to leave their children then. But people said that poor father was a cheat, and that I was as bad, and it was terrible to come down like that where we'd always been so respected. I went to church and said my prayers and read my Bible and "Whole Duty," but I didn't know really what Christianity was in those days. I was a Pharisee. To be thought well of was all I cared about. I've had my punishment, haven't I, sir? But I oughtn't to talk about punishment—if I hadn't had a come-down, perhaps I should have gone on being a Pharisee all my life.'

A maiden lady of fifty, brought up in a comfortable middle-class home, in an old-fashioned English town, whose chief anxiety has been to lay out the money which has been supplied her without stint on satisfactory family and company dinners, is about as unfit a character, as can be conceived to fight the world without backers. Miss Nene would have made an excellent housekeeper, perhaps, for any one in easy circumstances, but owing to her father's defalcations she had no one to recommend her for such a place, and she was glad at last to take, for a little more than her board and lodging, a situation which she heard of by chance—that of general domestic drudge for a struggling widowed tradesman in Walworth, who had ten small children, but could only afford to keep one servant, a little girl from the workhouse.

‘I’ve wished myself back there many a time,’ said the old woman, ‘but I thought I should go beside myself when I first got there. Everything was so noisy and so nasty, and the children were so unruly, and I’d never a minute to myself, and he was so near about the food, poor man, and what there was didn’t seem fit to set before a dog. I thought so then, God forgive me, and now many’s the day I get nothing but a crust I’ve picked up off an ash-heap. Yes, sir, that’s the simple truth. I soak them when I’ve a chance, to get a little of the dust out, and soften them a bit, but sometimes I’ve been so hungry that I was glad to eat them just as I found them. But I was going to tell you, sir—it was at Walworth I first got to know my Saviour. Sundays weren’t much like Sundays there, no more than they are here—it was one of those shops that keep open all day. The man sometimes put the shutters up for an hour or two in the afternoon, when he wanted to get a rest, but not often—there wasn’t much sleep to be got in that house whilst the children were about. Sometimes the poor man would get me to take the youngest of them to church just to keep them out of his way, but it wasn’t often that I could get to church anyhow. I always went morning and afternoon at Northampton (father stayed at home in the afternoon), and so when I first went to Walworth, I felt as if I’d got into a heathen country. I don’t know how it was, but one Sunday evening the shop was shut, and they were all out—all except the three youngest. They slept in my room—two on the

floor, and one with me. So I thought I'd have a quiet read in the parlour behind the shop, and I went up to my box to get out my Prayer-Book and Bible and the "Whole Duty." I brought down the "Rise and Progress," too. That was the only thing I'd got of mother's. Mother was very fond of it. When she was quite a little girl she had seen Dr Doddridge—he died in Portugal, you know, sir—but he used to preach in Northampton. He had a school there, in Sheep Street. Mother sometimes went to the chapel that used to be his—the one on Castle Hill. Father didn't like it, because he was a Church and King man, and thought all meetings were worse than French infidels. So mother didn't go often, but she was very fond of reading the "Rise and Progress." I'd kept it because it was mother's, but I'd never read it before that night. I began to read it then, and I read it afterwards, and it seemed to me that I'd got hold of a different sort of religion to what I'd been used to. I didn't like it at first, but afterwards when I read the Bible again, I seemed to understand it better. The texts I couldn't make out before seemed to fit in to what the "Rise and Progress" said ; and now, thank God, I've known for many a year what it is to have a Saviour to go to who'll comfort you none the less, but all the more, because you are poor and miserable, and everybody else looks down on you. I don't like to venture into a church now. I'm such a scarecrow—I'm afraid they'd turn me out. I've had to part even with my Bible, and if I had it still, my eyes are too dim now for reading print.

But it isn't having Christ inside a book that comforts you—it's having Him in your heart—always ready just when you want Him to comfort you.'

Poor old Miss Nene had long and often stood in dire need of comfort. When she lost her 'home' in Walworth through the bankruptcy of her employer, she had obtained a series of such other employments as a friendless, old-fashioned old woman, originally fitted for nothing but to manage a house in the country in which money could be got for asking, might be expected to obtain in London. At last, or rather very speedily, even these employments came to an end, and the poor old body who in her Northampton home walked about in an atmosphere of lavender sprigs and chintz-patterned *pourri*, and who would have had her peace of mind seriously disturbed if her cook had not taken out a hare's liver almost before the man who brought the game had drunk the glass of spirits poured out in acknowledgment of the gift, had for years—the alternative being imprisonment for life in the workhouse—been forced to poke about in London rubbish-heaps for the means of getting a scanty crust—sometimes for the crust itself. She was one of the walleted scarecrows who rise from their lairs in the lowest parts of London in the early morning to wander miles, and poke and pry, bent almost double, in search of the precious treasure of rags, bones, stray bits of metal, sodden cigar ends, and dogs' dung for the tanners! Of all the strugglers in even struggling London, these poor 'bunters' inspire me with the most pity, and I am half

inclined to say, with the most respect. *The healthy love of independence must be strong in them when, old, feeble, half-famished as they are, they will totter about for hours—no matter what the weather, or how mucky the places—in the not always realized hope of earning a morsel of food—food got, not given; and when they cannot get it, quietly starve ‘at home’—that is, in damp, cold, or hot, filthy, fusty, cramped holes, into which if a pointer were put, the kingdom would ring with indignant leaders on Barbarous Inhumanity to Noble Dumb Animals. I do not grudge the dogs their friends—those that are not sporting or pet dogs are often sorely in need of friends—but I wish that my Noble Dumb Animals—these poor old silent bone-grubbers, could get a little more attention shown them in a country like this, in which so much miscellaneous pity is going about like a roaring delugé seeking whom it may next drench.

XXV.

OLD BOOKS AND FRESH BLOSSOMS.

BOTH by day and night there is plenty of bustle in London street-markets, and by night there is plenty of blaze; the light and the loud shouting, however, have nothing cheerful in them. It is such a fierce struggle for life on the part of the vociferating vendors, such a piteously feeble holding on to life on the part of the buyers—anxiously speculating how best to lay out their few farthings—that one notes in those long, flaring, brawling marts. Wander during what I may call the march-time between Saturday and Sunday, through the avenues of stalls and barrows—four thousand of them—that are then hotly competing for custom in the New Cut, Union Street, Borough, the Brill, Tottenham Court Road, St. George's Market, Drury Lane, Exmouth Street, Leather Lane, Whitecross Street, Shoreditch, Whitechapel, the Commercial Road, &c., and you will not feel so much inclined, as, perhaps,

you were before, to think that this is the best of all possible worlds. The clamour of those miles of wrestling for a bare living will haunt your dreams. A few London street-markets, however, are free from this painful tumult.

The foot of the dead-wall of the Vinegar Works in the City Road is a favourite pitch for certain classes of street-sellers—open-air vendors of second-hand books, of second-hand music, of cheap coloured prints, of walking-sticks and gingham umbrellas, of birds, of roots, flowers in pots, shrubs and tiny trees, muster there in a row. They are an exceptionally quiet set of street-sellers—mostly old men, women, and children left in charge of their mothers' stalls—who seem to think that their wares do not stand in need of the screeching, brawling advertisements which half deafen one in most street-markets.

One sultry summer evening I stopped opposite one of these book-stalls, partly because I had been half choked with dust, and felt refreshed by the acid scent and taste of the Vinegar Works' atmosphere, and partly to amuse myself by examining the old bookseller's stock, with the chance of stumbling in it on something that might suit me. Under the stall, and on both sides of it, were boxes in which were heaped in confusion periodicals, pamphlets, and books—most of them with at least one cover off, or at any rate loose, and gritty with dust that stuck to the numerous grease-spots on page and binding like sand or pounce to moist ink. In these heaps, like seed-labels into garden-beds, were stuck weather-stained

tickets, inscribed—‘These at 1*d.*,’ ‘These at 2*d.*,’ ‘All these at 3*d.*’ On the stall stood and lay the more valuable portion of the stock—volumes that were priced at 4*d.* and upwards. Those that lay on their sides had the upper side covered with what had once been white paper, marked with price and title in big, bloated characters. It was a curious medley: Wesley’s ‘Primitive Physic;’ Walker’s ‘Lucian;’ a podgy octavo in stamped binding, vaguely labelled ‘Latin,’ which proved on opening to be *Lactantii(S.) Opera. Studio Mich. Thomasii*; the ‘Thorough-Bred Poor Gentleman’s Book, or How to Live in London on £100 a Year;’ ‘Henry, Earl of Moreland;’ three odd volumes of the *Spectator*; an ‘Eton Latin Grammar;’ a Bonnycastle’s ‘Arithmetic;’ a Welsh Bible; a Pinnock’s Goldsmith’s ‘History of Rome;’ Mrs Elizabeth Rowe’s ‘Works;’ ‘Roderick Random;’ and Bunyan’s ‘Grace Abounding;’ those were some of the books that rubbed shoulders on the stall. I was smiling at having found the ‘Life of the Rev John Fletcher, of Madeley, Salop,’ sandwiched between ‘Lives of Eminent Pirates and Highwaymen’ and the ‘Comic Minstrel,’ when the stall-keeper—a shrewd-looking but kind-looking old man, who had been taking his late tea or early supper on the other side of the stall—glanced up and said, ‘What’s the joke, sir? So long as there’s no harm in it, I always like to have my share of any fun that’s going.’

‘Ah, yes, sir,’ he went on, when I had told him that it was the miscellaneousness of his stock that had amused me; ‘I’ve a little of all sorts, old and young, and they’re

all, perhaps, a little the worse for wear—like us, I says to my neighbours for a joke. We're young and old, and most of us are a little the worse for wear, but let's hope there's good inside some of us, as it is with the books, I says—don't I, Fan ?'

Fan, a pretty little girl, who had been sharing the old man's meal, looked up and laughed.

'Is she your grand-daughter ?' I asked.

'No, sir, she don't belong to me, but we're fast friends—ain't we, Fanny? We're neighbours where we live, and now she's keeping that flower-stall next to mine for her mother, who's over there' (pointing to the Lying-in Hospital), 'and I promised her mother I'd give Fanny an eye till she was about again, but Fanny don't want much looking after. She's more help to me than I'm to her, I think. You're wanted, Fanny.'

Fanny darted to the customer who had stopped before her stall, divided in his choice between a bushy fuchsia and a giraffe-necked arum. Presently the arum went off, nodding its white head over its purchaser's shoulder ; and I went off too—having bought of the old man that queer 'religious' novel, 'Henry, Earl of Moreland.'

After that, I often stopped to have a chat with old Ben, as I found my bookseller was named. He was a quaint, kindly old fellow—no cynic—but still an acute observer of things and persons. He had bushy, grey eyebrows, a hooked nose, and very bright eyes—at least, they looked bright when seen through his horn-rimmed spectacles. So far, he had somewhat of the raven's hali-

fierce, half-knowing look, but there were no lines of scorn or craft in his face ; his mouth showed that he was a genial old fellow, and when he smiled, it was not a mere spasmodic twitch of the lips, but cheerful light bursting out all over the countenance.

He read books, as well as sold them ; and, as he had been in the street book-trade the greater part of his life, his reading had been pretty extensive and most drolly miscellaneous. ' I can relish almost any book that *is* a book,' he said to me ; ' I mean such as the men that wrote them couldn't help writing,—where there's no pumping up or putting together, just because the man's obliged to write for his living, or wants it to be said he's wrote a book, but up it comes, like a spring o' water, or one o' Fanny's flowers. It's a queer thing that I can't give a nice little girl like her more of a likin' for readin'. I've taught her, but she don't care about it—and yet she's no fool neither. And she's uncommon fond of her flowers, too, so that it's all the stranger to me. Books and blossoms ought to go together in folks' likin' to my thinking. Now there's a sweet sight,' old Ben added, pointing to the flower-stall, in front of which Fanny's mother, who had come out of hospital, was watering her tiers of plants, whilst Fanny sat beside it, nursing the new baby. '*There's* red and white and gold—all manner of colours for you ; and don't they seem to drink it in, as if they felt thirsty and were thanking her for doing it ? Well, *I* can see the beauty of flowers. Glad enough I was when Fan and her mother took the pitch.

Spring twelvemonth they came, and now I'm as grand as King Nebuchadnezzar with my hanging garden. It's a pleasant thing to look at, and to smell, especially in a road like this. It cools you like on the hottest day to look at the green, and when there's musks and mignonette and stocks all out together, it's like smelling music somehow. I'm pretty nigh as fond of flowers as Fanny is ; so it puzzles me that Fanny don't like books. She's a good little girl, and reads her Bible, but she'd a deal rather have me tell her stories out of it. As to other books, she don't seem to care to open them. It's a pity, for I'd lend her any I thought was proper for her, and so she could improve her mind. "They're so ugly, Ben," she says to me one day about mine—meaning the covers. And so far as binding goes, I'll confess my books ain't much to boast of. So I tried her with the smart-bound children's books we can sometimes pick up cheap a few months after they're published. She liked the covers, but she didn't care for the stories—not half so much as I did—though they were written *for* children *about* children. It's strange, because she's so quick in most things. She'll pick up anything that's told her fast enough, and she's fond of stories that way. Books or no books, however, Fanny's a good, willing little girl, and her poor mother is as well-meaning a woman as you're likely to come across. It's a pity she hasn't a better husband.'

'What, is he a lazy fellow that makes his wife work for him?'

'No, he ain't lazy exactly—he'll work hard enough ;

but all that he gets, and pretty nigh all his wife brings home, he spends on himself. He'll keep steady for his own sake for a goodish spell, and then he'll break out, and spend all he's saved, and let his wife and child that helped to earn it starve for anything he cares. There was three between Fanny and the new baby, that died, I do believe, because they hadn't food enough. I don't like to say I despise anybody. We're too fond of fancying we're virtuous people just for talking angrily about folks that haven't behaved themselves, and doing all the time just as mean things in another way ourselves. It's a cheap way *that* of being good. But, anyhow, I don't *respect* Bill Simmonds. He's been doing downright well lately—I mean so far as getting money goes—and yet he let his wife lie-in at the hospital. Of course, as things were, it was a lucky thing for the poor woman that she did manage to get in; but Bill ought to be ashamed of himself. He was well able—if he'd had any respect for himself and his wife, who'd work her finger-ends off for him, though he do treat her so badly—to have had her looked after comfortable at home. Hospitals wasn't intended to give husbands that don't care for their wives more money to buy beer.'

On an afternoon in the following winter, when I came to the Vinegar Works' dead-wall, I missed old Ben, the bookseller. Fanny's mother was there, ready to sell a doleful-looking array of potted evergreens, but finding a readier sale for the roast chestnuts she was vending from the shallow pan that covered her more cheerful-

looking charcoal fire. I made inquiries of her about old Ben.

'Ah, dear good man,' she answered, 'he's at 'ome bad. Fanny stayed to nuss him and the baby both. It would be 'ard if we didn't do something for a good old man like that. He's often fed us when, if it hadn't been for him, we shouldn't have had bite nor sup. Not that he was so well off neither, and we oughtn't to have been as bad off, if everybody did what they should. It's 'ard we can't do more for him now, and him that's done so much for us. I'd ha' tried to sell his books for him, poor old man—not that he sells many this time o' 'ear, 'cept now and then when he's got a smart un, and he 'appens on them as wants to give Christmas boxes to their young uns cheap. I'd ha' tried to sell 'em, anyhow, though it ain't much I knows about 'em. I could ha' made out the figurs on 'em, and I'd ha' tried to sell 'em for him, if I'd been let; but I *wasn't*, sir. He's very bad with the rheumatiz, poor old man. He can't lift his right 'and, and he's doubled up in the back, locked like in the l'ines, with his nose a'most on to his knees.'

Just then, Fanny brought round the muffled-up baby to receive another instalment of maternal refreshment. 'The gentleman's askin' about old Ben,' said Fanny's mother; how is he now?'

'He's as bad as ever, and as cheery,' was Fanny's answer. 'He's been makin' me laugh, an' baby to see me, with the funny stories he's been tellin', 'oldin' his 'ead a-one side all the time, an' twitchin', poor old man,

as if you was screwin' a gimlet into his neck. And nice stories he's told me, as isn't funny, out o' the Testament. I wish I was as good as old Ben, mother.'

I felt a wish to see this good old Ben again, and I asked where I could find him.

'Fanny'll take you, sir,' cried her pleased mother. 'Go with the gentleman, Fanny, and then you can run back and look after the chestnuts, whilst I'm a-nussin'.'

We had only to turn into Old Street Road, go a little way along it, and then turn a little way out of it, and we had reached Ben the bookseller's lodgings. He had one room in a house of which Fanny's father tenanted the ground floor and the yard. The yard had a little stable and a little shed in it. 'Oh, for the roots, and the cart, and the pony, and that—father's away in the cart now, goin' round with Christmas, and it's goin' off prime,' said Fanny when I asked her what need her father had of such outbuildings. His wife's hints and old Ben's more openly condemnatory appraisal of him were, therefore, I had reason to fear, merited. When we went into old Ben's room, he was sitting bent up over a fire that might have been larger without inconvenience to any one, and certainly with considerable increase of comfort to the invalid. When he heard Fanny's voice as we went in (his neck and back were too tightly 'locked' to allow him to turn his head) he said 'Why, Fan, the little un must have had an uncommon short spell of it—how do ye manage to keep him so quiet?'

'I've left baby with mother, Ben,' answered Fanny.

'Ah, but you mustn't do that, Fan—thank you all the same for your kindness in wanting to look after me. It's a comfort to have ye, but you must run back at once, and help mother whilst she's got the baby.'

'And so I'm goin', Ben. I've only brought round a gen'leman as wanted to see ye.'

'*That*, Fan; *who*, Fan—take your choice—but not *as*, Fan; why won't ye mind the grammar I teaches ye?'

Ben was a better grammarian in theory than in practice; he had educated himself into some notion of what was the 'proper way to speak,' but old habits, and the modes of speech of the people—the flesh-and-blood people—with whom he was most familiar, were ever and anon too strong for his theory and the better example set him (although by no means invariably) by his dearly beloved books.

When I had been introduced, Fanny ran back to her mother and baby, and Ben and I were left to talk. Our talk over his hearth was far more unreserved than it had been over his stall. I found that he was, so far as I can presume to judge, a Christian of the most genuine type. He did not wear his profession of faith like a Pharisee's phylactery—make a profuse use of theological phraseology in company in which he thought it might win him favour; he used, indeed, scarcely any of those set phrases which circulate amongst 'religious people,' until they too often become, in Mr Maurice's metaphor, 'notes and bills which there is nothing to meet.' Old

Ben's Christianity manifested itself in simple trust in God and love of Christ, and a Good-Samaritan-like interpretation of the word 'neighbour.' Fanny and her mother, I found afterwards, were far from being the only people whom old Ben helped, when he could, out of his slender earnings, and constantly, except when he was disabled, with his cheerful aid.

I had made up my little parcel of selections from Ben's stock—I had been obliged to make it smaller than I wished, because Ben knew my book-tastes pretty well, and was very quick in distinguishing, and very firm in refusing to sell any volume which I had selected, as he phrased it, 'just because I wanted to buy of him,'—when back came Fanny and the baby. Baby was sound asleep, but when the shawl in which it was muffled up was turned off its face, two or three of the white flowers called 'Christmas roses' made their appearance, loosely held in baby's dimpled paw.

'Them's for you, Ben—you're so fond o' flowers,' said Fanny.

'I hope you haven't been spending your father's money on me; thank you kindly all the same, but why *won't* you mind your grammar, Fan?' was Ben's response, as Fanny laid the flowers on the knee of the pleased old man.

'No, they was giv' me. If I could spend money, I'd buy summat better than that for ye, Ben. An' I can't see as it's *all* father's when we arns it. The chestnuts 'as been selling like one o'clock.'

‘What’s the price of one o’clock, Fan?’ the old man asked with a chuckle (parenthesized by a sharp twitch of pain).

‘*I’ve* been making money too, Fan,’ he went on, putting some into her hand; ‘so you put baby down by the fire, and run out again like a kind little girl, and tell ’em to send in half-a-hundred, and we’ll have a bit of a blaze, and—hum—hum—tell mother—hum—hum—hum.’

‘Hum—hum—hum,’ I think I could not have been mistaken in interpreting into orders to buy something for supper, and an invitation to Mrs Simmonds to share it with Ben and Fan.

XXVI.

THE FORBESSES.



WHEN I first knew Archibald Forbes he was a merchant in London. He was a widower, and his only surviving child, Janet, kept his handsome old house at Clapton. It was an old-fashioned place, with old-fashioned furniture, begirt with noble old trees, and lofty old garden walls. It was a pleasant place to spend a Sunday afternoon at. My friend was not one of those rigid Sabbatarians who would lock up an infant's toys between Saturday night and Monday morning, who look upon a cheerful word or smile on Sunday as a sin, and shudder at the sight of people, who have been pent up all the week, taking a quiet Sunday walk, as if they were indubitably swarming down the broad road to destruction. But still his Scotch breeding made him keep Sunday more scrupulously than the majority of English people keep it. He never read a newspaper or wrote a letter on Sunday. He did

not object to a friend's dropping in to tea, but he never invited company on Sunday. There was a peaceful hush in the old house and grounds. The day there seemed an island of calm, divided by some magic moat from Saturday and Monday. At that time the Scotch prejudice against the 'kist o' pipes' was far more prevalent than it is in these days. But Forbes did not share it. He had a very rich-toned little chamber organ, on which on Sunday afternoons and evenings Janet used to play *Martyrs*, and many another Scottish psalm-tune, whilst Forbes added his deep bass to his daughter's silvery treble.

Once or twice on Sunday, more frequently on other days, I had met at Forbes's his nephew, Patrick Forbes, who was engaged to his cousin Janet.

'Non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare :
Hoc tantum scio—non amo te, Sabidi.'

I could not say why I did not like Patrick Forbes, but somehow I did *not* like him. He was good-looking, pleasant-mannered, intelligent, well-informed, lively, and energetic ; his uncle had the highest opinion of him, and, as I understood, had become his surety for a very large amount to enable him to raise money and enter a pushing engineering firm on equal terms with the senior partners. This amount was so large that I could not help wondering how a shrewd man like my friend Archibald could have put almost all his eggs, so to speak, into one basket. He *gave* money away very liberally ; he lent it freely, too, in small sums, on very slender security, to give strugglers

he thought deserving of help a chance of extricating themselves ; but when business proper was concerned, there was, generally speaking, not an acuter man in London than Archibald Forbes. I was, therefore, I repeat, startled to find that he should have staked almost his whole property on the success and honesty of his nephew. But Patrick was his uncle's hero. He was the head of *their* Forbesses—the only son of Archibald's dead elder brother—the only one near in blood, except Janet, left to Archibald. The young fellow's career hitherto had been a stride from one success to another, and his uncle was thoroughly proud as well as fond of him. He was engaged to his cousin—he was sure to get on—and, therefore, there could be no wrong done to Janet in giving her cousin, at her infinitesimal risk, an earlier chance than he might possibly otherwise have got of securing a first-rate ' position ' for her. That, I suppose, was the way in which Archibald reasoned—if he reasoned about the matter at all.

Janet's feelings towards the man to whom she was betrothed I could not exactly fathom. She was evidently devotedly fond of him, and yet every now and then some chance word, glance, or gesture of his would bring a flicker of distrust upon her face, instantly followed by a look of self-reproach for having distrusted him, and an almost angrily defiant look of flat contradiction of herself, in case any one should have noticed her flicker of distrust. At any rate, that was my fancy.

I have said that I could not tell at first why I could not like Patrick Forbes ; but when I came to analyse my feelings, I found out how it was. I could not get rid of the impression that he was a man who led a double life—that he made himself agreeable at his uncle's, chimed in with his opinions, and did the affectionate lover and good young man before his cousin, as a matter of policy ; but that all the time, however blandly he might smile, he felt it to be a matter of disagreeable necessity—that he was *acting*, not living his genuine life. He was *too* fond of smiling blandly. The smile came out with a suspiciously spasmodic suddenness whenever Janet turned her face towards him, and withered away with suspicious rapidity as soon as he thought that no one was looking at him.

Charlotte Brontë, if I remember rightly, considered children and dumb animals the most unerring judges of a man's amiability—people that little ones, and dogs, and cats, and so on, 'take to,' being, in her opinion, really kind-hearted ; and those they shun—however kind in semblance—just the opposite. My friend Archibald could have stood this test bravely. Big, rugged, grey-bearded old fellow though he was, he was everywhere a children's pet. Toddlers embraced his great legs, and pursed up their little lips into rosebuds to invite a kiss from him. As soon as Archibald's footfall was heard in the stable-yard, his horse, if loose in his stall, would whinny, and come to look out over the half-door, and when his master patted him, the horse would rub his

head against him like a cat. The aged, fat, sleepy, toothless St. Bernard Archibald professed to keep as a 'watch-dog,' shook off his torpor, came out of his kennel, wagged his tail, and into strange vagaries fell, as he would dance—goutily clumsy gambols—when he heard his master's voice; and Archibald's Skye terrier, 'Laird of Macleod,' couched sentry every night on the mat outside Archibald's bedroom door. The cat or kitten of the period, in the old Clapton house, also always made first favourite of the master—purred itself off to sleep as near to him as it could get, rode about on his broad shoulder (if a kitten, playing with the dangling ribbons of his bonnet), and when he walked in the garden, went up and down the paths before him, sideways, and sticking up its tail.

Patrick Forbes, weighed in the children-and-dumb-animal balance, was certainly found wanting: neither cats nor dogs sidled up to or fawned on him. I was present once at a little *fête* which his cousin had got up for some poor little Homerton children in whom she and her father took a good deal of interest, and Patrick was present at it too. The little ones buzzed round Janet and her father like flies round sugar-barrels. Patrick, to please his cousin and his uncle, tried hard to seem kind and comical to the youngsters, but they shied him. The test I have referred to is, I think, too sweeping. There are thoroughly kind-hearted people, I believe, who cannot 'make friends' with children because they are diffident as to their powers of pleasing them. But Patrick's

difficulty was not of this kind. He had full confidence in himself—only he had no sympathy with the children ; and children, at any rate, can instantly detect a sham of feeling towards themselves.

It chanced one day that I was passing through one of the quiet side-streets of semi-detached villas, and so on, that branch out of the broad, bigger-villared, but not much more bustling, Camden Road.

Passing through this side-street, I saw a face through a window, a face I at once recognized—the dark handsome face of Patrick Forbes.

There was nothing wonderful, of course, in his visiting in a part of London in which I did not know before that he had any acquaintances, but there *was* something singular in the circumstances under which I found him there. He was sitting at a table with his elbow on it, very close to a pretty but childish-looking girl of seventeen or eighteen, who pretended to be drawing, whilst he pretended to be inspecting her work. 'There was an 'almost-caught' look in both their faces that convinced me the drawing was a mere pretext—that it was only being proceeded with because an old gentleman, whom I took to be the pretty girl's father, had come into the room, and was peering over her shoulder through his double eye-glass, looking, apparently, somewhat puzzled at the small progress she had made since he had last seen her drawing.

The next time I met Patrick Forbes at Clapton I said to him—

‘So, Mr Patrick, you’ve a new profession, I find.’

‘New profession!—what do you mean?’

‘Didn’t I see you giving a drawing-lesson in Camden Town a week or two ago?’

He flushed and looked confused for a second, but instantly recovered himself with clever coolness.

‘I suppose Mr —— has been trying to make you jealous, Janet,’ he laughed, turning to his cousin. ‘Yes, I teach a young lady drawing, and I’m afraid I shan’t get much credit out of it. She’s a nice little chit, but I can’t say much for her notion of chalks. You knew old Tidy, sir?’ turning to his uncle. ‘Oh no, I remember now that father fell in with him after you’d come to London. *He’s* left Glasgow, and settled in London, too; but I’m afraid the poor old fellow hasn’t done much for himself. He lives in a nutshell of a house, and Louey—that’s his daughter’s name—wants to go out as a governess. She’s rubbing up her accomplishments, as she calls it. Poor lass! she mustn’t rub too hard, or she’ll rub them all away—there isn’t much substance to polish. I could see that money wasn’t over-abundant there, and so I’m trying to teach her all I know of pencil and crayon and sepia, and so on. I didn’t think it worth mentioning, and, besides, it would have looked like bragging—though it’s precious little to brag of, after all.’

I was not convinced, but I could see that Patrick’s ingenuity had turned the first attempt I had made to give a hint that it might be well to scrutinise his character a little more closely into a means of making

both his uncle and his cousin think more highly of him even than they thought before.

I did not see Patrick Forbes again until I met him beside his uncle's sick-bed. Until I got to his house, I did not know that my friend was ill, but Patrick, I learnt, had been most affectionately assiduous in his attentions for nearly a week. During three nights out of the six he had insisted on sitting up with his uncle. When I met him he had come to say, with earnest-sounding professions of deep regret, which for a time made me ashamed of my previous suspicion of him, that imperative business made it absolutely necessary that he should start at once for Sweden. 'You must go, my lad, of course,' said Archibald, as soon as an outline of the particulars had been given him, 'but write as often as you can, for poor Janet's sake. We will be wearying to hear of ye, Patrick.'

Janet received a line from her lover, written at Hull, just before he went on board his steamer; and that was the last letter she ever had from him. Her father, however, became so much worse that for five or six weeks she had no time to fret over her lover's silence. She and the devoted servants, English as well as Scotch, and uneasy 'Laird of Macleod,' and even the young cat (which was sometimes allowed, from oversight, to leap upon the bed, but was removed with a suddenness which she could not understand, and scratchingly resented, when she wanted to lick his wasted, swollen-veined hand), seemed to have lost all interest in any life but Archi-

bald's. Archibald was a tough old Scotchman, however—he had ‘supped parritch,’ and braved all kinds of weathers, when he was a youngster, and he bravely weathered the fever the fogs from the Hackney Marshes had given him.

I went away from his house one night, rejoicing to think that the crisis of his illness was safely over. The next morning at breakfast-time I read in the ‘City Article’ of my paper the following paragraph:—

‘The firm of Menzies and Forbes, engineers and ship-builders, Millwall, has stopped payment. Its solvency has for some time been doubtful, but the crash appears to have been precipitated by the defalcations of the junior partner, Mr Patrick Forbes. Some weeks ago he went out to Sweden, professedly to superintend the firm’s operations there, and has received very heavy remittances. He has now absconded. He has, we understand, been guilty, in a quiet way, of great personal extravagance, and his partners, we are told, have trusted with absurd confidence in Forbes’s tact. We greatly fear that the only creditors of the firm—we should rather say of Mr Patrick Forbes—who will ever see anything like their money again, are those who advanced money to enable Mr Patrick Forbes to enter the firm which he has ruined, on the security of his uncle, Mr Archibald Forbes, of Love Lane, Wood Street, and Lower Clapton.’

Beggary and misery for Archibald and his daughter this paragraph might be concisely summarised into. I started at once for Clapton, hoping that I might be able to

contrive to keep the disastrous news from my friend until I could break it to him with a better chance of its not absolutely crushing him. He had learnt it, however, before I got to Clapton. He had had his paper up that morning for the first time since his attack. 'Hech, sir, what's this?' exclaimed the indignantly-tearful old Scotch cook, who, in the confusion into which the household had been thrown, opened the door for me. 'Mr Patrick, they tell me, has ruined the good master—foul fa' his smilin' face! And it'll just brak the heart o' my young leddy! If she'd only greet her een oot, puir lassie, but there she sits, as still as a stane. Ye'll be wantin' to see the master, sir? Aiblins I'd better gang up, an' speer whether he'd be wullin' to see ye the noo.'

She soon came back with a request that I would step up-stairs.

'Thank you for coming,' said poor Archibald, as he took my hand; and he continued talking feverishly, ever and anon lapsing into Scotch under the influence of strong feeling. 'I suldna' hae likit to see ilka body the noo; but ye mean it kindly—ye mean it kindly, man, I ken. It's a blow, and that I'll nae deny. It's hard at my time o' life to have to begin the world again—surely, I will, man, or what's to become o' my puir Janet? But it isna the siller that fashes me. I've been a fule, and I must pay the lawin'; but there'll be something left, and I've pith in me yet to make a home for Janet—once I get over this bout—in New Zealand or somewhere. It's the thocht that my ain brither's son suld be written aboot

in the public prents as if he was a scheming profligate villain. If I thocht sae—God forgie me, a professing Christian man, for saying it—if I thocht he'd been playing all this time with my Janet for his ain mean purposes—I'd strike him dead, if he came into the room this minute. Not you, nor twenty at the back of ye, suld save him. But *Patrick!* If he'd been my ain bairn, I couldna hae lo'ed him better. I canna believe it, I canna believe it, man. My puir dear Janet!—puir, puir Janet! What's to come o' her? God forgie me!

Just then Janet came into the room, fetched by the nurse, who had told her that there was some one with her father who *would* talk about business, 'try all she could to quiet 'em both.'

Janet did not look much like the 'stane' to which the affectionate cook had likened her. There was an indignant flush on her otherwise white cheeks; an angry gleam shot out of her grey eyes. If I had been a creditor of her father's, she would, I doubt not, have bidden the broad-shouldered nurse assist her in ejecting me from her father's room. But when Janet saw who her father's visitor was, she told the nurse to go downstairs and get a little rest—poor girl, *she* looked far more in need of it—and then turning to me, she said, '*Is* this true? Oh, it can't be, it *can't* be!'

I could only answer that I knew nothing more of the circumstances than what I had read in the papers.

'But it cannot be as they say,' she insisted. 'Patrick may have got into difficulties, poor fellow, but he will

come back and face them like a man. He isn't the kind of creature the paper talks about. You *can't* believe it, can you, papa?'

'No, my lass, I cannot—at any rate, I *will* not, until the lad has had time to clear himself, and hasn't done it. It will be a bad business for you and me, my poor Janet, anyhow. But if he can clear his name, we'll never blame him, will we, my lass?'

But Patrick never showed his face in England again, and tongues which a variety of motives had kept locked being loosed, it soon became evident that both in business and in private life Patrick Forbes had been a downright scamp.

I only once heard Archibald mention his nephew's name after this became an indisputable fact. He and Janet were going out to Otago with the little he had succeeded in saving out of the fire. When the sale of their household effects had been settled, there would be nothing more to detain them in England. I called at the old house in Clapton on the last night they spent in it—the night before the auction. The familiar furniture, arranged in 'lots,' had a very drearily unfamiliar look. The house was as unhomelike as an inn, without the inn's comfort. It seemed to be constantly reminding its whilom master that it was time for him to be off.

'Ah, man, I shall be glad to be on board ship,' said Archibald to me. 'This last day has been the worst of all. Poor old Tidy has been here. That villain Patrick has borrowed as much as he could of Tidy, too—but he's

done him a worse wrong. Tidy held his tongue about the money, but now he's found out that the villain seduced his daughter. He used to sham to teach the poor little thing drawing out of kindness—ah, it was through you we got to hear about that—and then got her to meet him, and made a fool of her. The poor old father didn't come to reproach me, but it cut me almost deeper than anything yet to see him sitting there, shaking and crying, and begging and praying that I would let him know where the villain was. He thinks, poor old man, that he could persuade him to marry her! Bad as it is for the poor lass, it would be worse, I think, with such a husband. I thank God my Janet's quit of him. It's been a terrible blow for my poor girl, but she'll get over it. Women are not like men—their feelings can't swing round all at once when their judgment turns. But now she knows what he was, she won't let him break her heart—*curse him!*—God forgive me, though. The poor wretch has no friends now, if God won't have pity on him!

XXVII.

MISS BERTHA.



NOT a hundred miles, as people say, from grey, black-bloomed Spitalfields Church there is a street of old-fashioned red-brick houses, very dingy, very dusty-windowed, very dirty as to their cracked steps, and blistered as to their faded paint, but still looking revindicable by 'respectability.' Seen by moonlight, they might pass for decent private residences, and though daylight, however dim, reveals their shabbiness, they still appear to be a good many grades above the miserable buildings which their back and side windows command. Some of them are used, in whole or in part, for warehouses and workrooms ; others are let off to families in floors and single chambers. Not very many years ago, however (I do not wish to particularise too minutely, as the subject of this little sketch is still living, although no longer *Miss Bertha*), one of these old houses obtained a very exceptional

tenant. It had been whitewashed, painted, papered, and scrubbed from top to bottom before she took possession, and that was enough to astonish the neighbours; but when they looked out from their back windows, and saw the jumble of packing-cases, rope, straw, mildewed blacking-bottles, potsherbs, ashes, and other rubbish that had littered the backyard for years, pitched and shovelled into the scavenger's cart, that had been backed with difficulty into the little lane behind, they were greatly puzzled. To add to their perplexity, men were seen mending the fragmentary, smoky trellis-work that ran round the grimy walls, and painting it sap-green; and other men making side and centre beds, laying down gravel, and digging up the hard earth round the root of the blackly bristling lilac tree which, later and later for years, had faintly remembered that spring had come, and that it ought to be budding, and more and more feebly had striven to brighten up the dismal oblong with at least one little bunch of sickly blossom.

At last a van or two brought the new tenant's furniture, plain but good; not new, and yet not looking as if it had been bought second-hand—rather as if it had been selected for simplicity's sake, out of a long-owned stock which included a great many grander articles. A neat cottage piano was one of the things carried in. A decently-dressed middle-aged woman, who arrived in a cab, with a cat in a basket, superintended the laying down of the carpets, the putting up of the bedsteads, &c., and at first was supposed to be the new tenant.

But *she* arrived later, also in a cab—out of which she carried a Belgian canary in a brass-wire cage. This was Miss Bertha, tall, pale, large-eyed, long-eyelashed, dark-haired, delicate-featured. She wore a mourning dress, but by no means a mourning face. Some of those who watched her in told her afterwards that they had taken her for a young widow who was glad that her old man had died, because he had left her a lot of tin—though they could not make out why she should have taken up her abode amongst *them*. There, however—in the old house that looked so incongruously neat and clean, with its renovated back garden, which, in spite of East-end smoke, always looked, at any-rate, so startlingly tidy—this mysterious young lady did take up her abode, with the middle-aged woman, her servant Hannah.

At first, Miss Bertha was generally supposed to be ‘cranky’—a supposition which excited the local charwoman, who went in to do the rough work of the house, into satirical indignation. ‘I wish all missuses ’ad got a tile off, then,’ she would snort with contemptuous loyalty. ‘She knows how to speak to a poor woman, she do. Hannah is nice to speak to, but she ain’t nigh so haffable as the sweet young lady.’ It was soon discovered, however, that Miss Bertha’s ‘crankiness’ consisted merely in a wish to benefit those about her, without pulling a long face over the business. When that discovery was made, plenty of clients were willing to save her the trouble of going about to do them good, and did *her* good by opening her eyes to the fact that

the shrewdest people, if they trust merely to intuitive 'insight into character,' can easily be 'done.' But Miss Bertha was not discouraged. 'Poor creatures,' she said, 'if they are not as badly off as they make themselves out to be, it is not much they have to boast of. And if I was deceived, I had only my own laziness to blame. I should have gone to see for myself. It's the easiest kind of charity to put your hand into your pocket, when you have a purse in it.' So Miss Bertha thenceforth made a rule of seeing for herself, and some of those she went amongst respected her shrewdness almost as much as they loved her kindness. 'You can't do *her*,' they said. Others would as soon have thought of trying to 'do' her as Dr Arnold's boys of telling him a lie. Both classes of beneficiaries called her 'Miss Bertha,' and she soon got that name also amongst those who did not care for her help or counsel — dirty, bulldog-browed men, slatternly, gin-drinking women, white-faced hobbydehoys, filthy youngsters, who regarded her curiously as a comical *lusus naturæ*, when she quietly walked along the lanes and courts and alleys, in which they lounged, squatted, flitted, and played at pitch and toss. These, nevertheless, revered her, after their fashion, for her goodness in helping those of their neighbours that were not strong, or sharp, or 'game' enough to take care of themselves; and felt proud that she was not afraid to dwell amongst *them*, and to turn, without even looking over her shoulder, corners which no policeman would have dared to turn without a mate in uniform or plain clothes. They would

even have maltreated, like a luckless solitary constable fallen into their too often cowardly clutches, any stranger ruffian who had ventured to insult Miss Bertha, to whom the blackguards of the neighbourhood, of both sexes and all ages, had tacitly agreed to give a free pass at all times. Everybody who knew anything of her, for half a mile and more round the old house—which she had furbished up into neatness, and, simply through living in it, caused it to look cosily homelike—spoke of her as ‘Miss Bertha’—at least as Miss some other Christian name something like that. The postman, of course, knew her surname, and it was down on her tradesmen’s bills, and water-rate collector’s receipts, and such like ; but even her tradesmen never used it in speaking of her. The neighbourhood was fond of her, and showed its fondness by calling her Miss Bertha.

I made this lady’s acquaintance very soon after she settled in her new-old home. I heard a little about her from herself, a great deal from her clients ; and therefore am in a position to give some account of her work, and of the motives which led her to take to it.

She had not relinquished the daily companionship of her own class because some heart-crushing calamity had made familiar scenes unendurable, or unfamiliar employment, of the self-denying kind, a necessity if she would avoid madness. She had lost no lover ; she had made no vows of celibacy. As I have hinted, she is married now ; and, whilst she lived in the East-end, I have no doubt that she looked forward to being married some

day, with the pleasurable certainty which is natural in a good-looking, amiable girl. Only she was in no hurry to get married. Having time and money to spare she determined, since there were no claims of close kinship to tether her to 'society,' to go and live amongst the poor, and devote herself for awhile entirely to their service. When quite young, she had been left an orphan, with no near relations, and just enough to educate her well, and provide a modest subsistence for her when her school-days were over. According to her means, she was charitable then, but it was not much that she could do in the way of alms or money-aid of any kind; and she used to long for Rothschildian riches, in order that she might rebuild into comfortable beauty all London slums, and enable every very poor man to emigrate, or, better still, to get remunerative work at home, and send his children to schools of superhuman excellence: in a word, with £200 a year, she longed to abolish pauperism and crime. She never got the Rothschildian riches, but, when she was two-and-twenty, a great-aunt left her a handsome house, handsomely furnished, and a comfortable little income, absolutely at her own disposal. A good many dreamers about social perfectibility excuse themselves for not doing anything towards an approximation to it when windfalls tumble in, because they still fall far short of the total required for the regeneration of society. But Miss Bertha was not a dreamer of this kind. She determined to do the best she could with what she had—making it emphatically the best, by

adding personal sympathy and labour to pecuniary aid. Who had the first claim on her? she asked herself. None of her distant relatives stood in any need of help. Her great-uncle had made the money his widow had left her in the London silk-trade, and so Miss Bertha resolved to settle herself, for a time at any rate, in the dreary Spital-fields and Bethnal Green district—where few fortunes seem to be made now-a-days. The trustees of the small property her father had left her plainly told her that she was mad; but they had no control over her great-aunt's bequest. 'One fool has left it to another,' was their uncomplimentary comment on the gift. The old men were brothers, and had adjoining offices in Great St. Helen's. They saw her to the foot of their staircase, and watched her anxiously as she tripped out into Bishopsgate Street. Perhaps the queer old church that stands in the midst of their commercial convent may then, for the first time, have struck them as out of place. 'What business,' they may have thought, 'has Christianity to get mixed up with business?'

Miss Bertha sold her great-aunt's great house in the sleepy old W.C. square, together with most of the furniture, and migrated with Hannah to the East-end. Because she had come to live there, however, she did not think there would be any virtue in living without a servant in a bare garret. Hannah, and her modestly comfortable home, and her garden pathetically struggling to look pretty, Miss Bertha employed as civilizing agencies. A series of East-end girls were trained for service under

Hannah's care; and very pleasant were the 'mothers' meetings,' and very merry the children's parties that came off in Miss Bertha's parlour. And the mothers took her advice all the more readily because she made them laugh at her jokes over her own inexperience in house-keeping; while the children pulled her dress out at the gathers in their romps. The small boys admitted to these entertainments, on condition of combed hair and clean hands and faces, pronounced Miss Bertha 'a brick;' and that fame of her soon 'spread around.' Long, too, before 'Window Garden Shows' had become the admirable 'institution' into which they have developed, Miss Bertha held them on a small scale in her spruced-up back-garden. At one, at which I was privileged to assist, there were only two blighted balsams, and five sickly creeping-jennys. There was very little to choose between the exhibits; and so Miss Bertha settled the difficulty by giving prizes to all. 'They were every bit as good as her flowers,' she said, 'though she *did* employ a gardener.' Nothing except chrysanthemums thrived in Miss Bertha's garden. When they were out, in pink and purple and golden stars, Miss Bertha was as proud of them as the Temple gardener is of his, and invited her neighbours to 'walk in her grounds'—that was thought a great joke—and to take tea with her; an invitation which was still more widely appreciated, since Miss Bertha's 'tea' meant strong tea, with cream sometimes, and loaf-sugar, and shrimps, and water cress, and plum-cake and seed-cake, and buttered toast and muffins.

There are few things more difficult than really getting *at* the struggling—those of the struggling, that is, who best deserve to have their struggles aided. But Miss Bertha had this knack. She found her way into all kinds of strange corners, as easily, as naturally, as rising water, and found out all about those she went to visit without wounding their *amour propre*. The honestly-struggling poor whom Miss Bertha found out fully forgave her her power of helping them; and that is saying a great deal. They did more: they opened their hearts to her kindness, and basked in it. Swells might be a queer lot generally,—even when they wanted to be kind; but here, at any rate, was a well-dressed, rich young lady, who took to them because she felt that she was made of the same flesh and blood. That was the feeling which Miss Bertha's clients entertained. Beaten old men even, all the prouder for the continued worsting life had given them (because they had laid the sole blame on the conditions of their life, flatly contradicting their often selfish and conceited, but sometimes most natural, sense of right), would tell Miss Bertha all their troubles, and love her for listening to them. She soon discovered that her great aunt's money was a very small plaister to spread over the sores of even the portion of the East-end she had selected for her patient; but what she could do, she did—doubling its value by her heart-warm words, and looks, and hand-shakings. She helped some families to emigrate. She paid the railway-fare of workmen who had a chance of bettering themselves in other parts of

England. She supplemented the semi-starvation rate of parochial aid with money and with fellow-creature's pity. She settled chandlers' bills that hung round debtors' necks like logs. She took tools out of pawn. She advanced market-money to costermongers. She paid school-pence. She had reading and sewing-classes at her own house. She did her best to encourage temperance, and industry, and thrift—although, as she said, it often seemed like cruel satire to preach saving to those amongst whom she moved. She hired vans to carry both youngsters and adults to the Rye House and the Forest, and sometimes went with them to share and increase their enjoyment of the fresh air and freedom from the collar in which they trudged round the dull mill-track of their daily lives.

Favourite, however, as Miss Bertha was with those of her East-enders who could get about, the sick and the bed-ridden loved her still more. It was not only for the little luxuries she took them, and the necessities with which she kept them supplied—although the sickness of the poor so often means starvation, or, at any rate, partial deprivation of even ordinary food, that such gifts are displays of charity with which the sternest political economist can find no fault. But Miss Bertha was so bright and yet so patient—she would chat so cheerfully, and yet modulate so softly into sweet, soothing, serious talk—she would read so unwearingly, and yet stop so good-temperedly the moment she saw that she wearied—she nursed so unwinkingly, and so neat-handedly, without the slightest fuss or mysterious mut-

tered asides (worse almost than the loudest noise in a sick room), that her mere presence seemed to breathe out balm.

A weaver, who lived in Hare Street, told me how she nursed his little girl. He had no work then, and his idle loom was almost the only furniture in his room. The little girl lay sickening with fever on the floor. The weaver was looking out of his long dim casement on the dreary street, wondering what he was to do for the ailing little one; how, indeed, he was to get bread for his other children, and his wife, and himself. 'I didn't believe there could be a God, sir,' said the poor man; 'else why should them as had done no harm be left like that? Me an' the missis might have sins to answer for; but what had the little uns done? I was thinking like that, sir, an' my heart was as dismal as the Whitechapel Road when the heast wind is blowin'; when all of a sudden I see Miss Bertha in the street, with her servant behind her, lugging along a big basket. She'd got to hear of us somehow from the doctor that had dropped in for a minute to look at little Nettie. Well, sir, up she come, and whipped off her shawl and bonnet just as if she was at home, and she gave Nettie some coolin' stuff out of the basket, an' then she give my missis the basket, an' told her to see what she could find in it, and bundled all the other youngsters out, laughing like, and found 'em places to sleep in with the neighbours somehow; an' then she come back, and set down on the floor, and nursed Nettie as if she'd been paid for it. She made me an' the missis go to bed, but she sat up all night, an' next morning

when the doctor come agin (*she* sent for him), she wrapped Nettie up in shawls, and carried her off in a cab, and nursed her in her own house till she got well. And she set me a-goin' too. There *is* Christians in the world, an' Miss Bertha's one o' the best on 'em.

Miss Bertha was a genuine Sister of the Poor, and was welcomed by them accordingly, though she did not make herself a dowdy when she went to call upon them. She did not squander money on dress, she did not bother herself about it; but dress-makers as well as other people, she reasoned, would starve if they did not get work, and, God having given her a fine figure and a winsome face, she did not see why she should do her worst to disguise his gifts, just because she was going amongst those whose squalid life stood most in need of Beauty's brightening. Of course, she knew that she was beautiful. Genius (although I am sceptical about *that*, if we may judge from the way in which geniuses write about themselves) may be unconscious, but Beauty never is. Some beauties pretend to be; but that is a paltry trick to extort admiration which would flow far more freely and genuinely if suffered to come unforced. In their ignorance, they despise the homage which no one with an eye can help rendering them, and crave after flattery which sounds like irony even on *their* charms. Miss Bertha, on the other hand, took her beauty for granted, and was grateful for it as a gift, instead of vain of it as a merit. She looked upon her face just as she looked upon her fortune—as some-

thing entrusted to her for the benefit of the by no means beautiful or pecunious East-enders amongst whom she had pitched her tent.

They certainly liked her all the better for being beautiful. Moralise as we may (and we ugly men, and some of you not quite beautiful ladies, are very fond of doing) about the skin-deep nature of facial charms, 'good looks' in woman or man, so long as they are not flatly contradicted by bad deeds, give their owners the social 'pull' over their worse-favoured fellows. Such is our reverence for good looks that, even when they *are* contradicted by bad deeds, we tend to grow sceptical about the badness of those deeds. When a *lovely* woman stoops to folly, she finds scores of champions. I suppose there is a wholesale, rough-and-ready morality in all this. Physical ugliness results, first or last, from disobedience to Nature's laws, and so Nature puts a premium on physical beauty. We see the justice of the arrangement when it manifests itself in the toper's grog-blossomed nose; but the results of ancestral sin, and long years of social neglect and oppression, written out in the faces and carved on the forms of those who struggle against their inherited predisposition to the disfiguring sins, and who are only one more set of victims to the neglect and oppression—*these* cases are more puzzling. What we know not now, however, we may hope to know hereafter—

'*Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen.*'

At present, we must be content to recognize the fact that, in many ways, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Both morally and physically a great many of Miss Bertha's young clients bore the marks of their parents' sins, but to one, only the moral taint apparently had come down. Mary C—— was a fair, fresh-coloured, brown-haired, blue-eyed, very interesting-looking girl. She was, temporarily at any rate, very grateful for kindness; she had far more indignant sympathy for tortured man or beast than is commonly found in her class; she had even an amount of unstified feeling which easily moved her to tears and good resolutions, when it was affectionately appealed to. But, with all this, she had an innate leaning to vice which caused her to fall into it again and again, even when just before she had seemed to loathe it. Mary C—— tried Miss Bertha's faith and patience very sorely, but Miss Bertha would not give her up. More than once Mary slipped out of sight, but Miss Bertha tracked her like a good genius; and, at last, just before she married and migrated to Lancashire, she had the satisfaction of seeing her pet scapegrace, so far as human judgment could predict, safely 'settled.' Here is another illustration of what I have said about good looks. It was the girl's good looks that first awakened Miss Bertha's interest, and Miss Bertha's beauty acted on Mary like a tranquillizing charm.

The two became acquainted thus; on her return from some errand of mercy one Saturday night, Miss Bertha

was walking along the brawling, blazing Whitechapel Road, when just as she drew near a street-stall of flimsy gimcracks, behind which an old woman was sitting, a party of half-drunken roughs rolled up. They kicked over the stall, and beneath it the old woman tumbled into the mud. In a second Miss Bertha was in the slushy roadway, picking up the old woman with one hand, whilst with the other she spread her shawl over the goods on which the roughs were about to make a raid. If Miss Bertha had not interfered, the people about might, perhaps, have looked upon the onslaught as a good joke, or, at any rate, as a thing in which they were not called upon to meddle; but when they saw a lady championing the friendless old stall keeper, they opened such a hot fire of abuse upon the roughs that, finding themselves in a minority, they slunk off after the cowardly fashion of their kind. Loudest, sincerest, and, alas! most blasphemous in her abuse, was a young girl, Mary C——: then little more than fifteen, but tricked out in ragged finery. She helped Miss Bertha to right the old woman and her stall, and when the poor old creature was quieted down, Mary and Miss Bertha walked on together. The girl was a strange companion, but Miss Bertha had a Christ-like fearlessness of 'bad company.' She persuaded Mary to go home with her to have a talk. She gave her a warm meal and dry shoes and stockings, and as the two sat over the parlour fire, she prevailed upon her to tell her history. Miss Bertha would not take the girl into the

kitchen, partly because she did not wish to scandalise Hannah, whose faith, hope, and charity were weaker than her mistress's, when those whom Hannah called 'hussies' were concerned; but chiefly because she wanted Mary to feel at home, and felt that she could make her feel so better by themselves. Part of Mary's history Miss Bertha jotted down whilst it was being told. Blanks she filled up from recollection afterwards. When I had read these notes I was allowed to take a copy of them. Thus they ran:—

'My name is Mary C——. No, miss, I can't say where I was chris'n'd. I don't know if ever I was chris'n'd. No, nor if my father and mother was ever married. Father's in the 'Moodies now, I've heared. Yes, miss, he's a convict—lag *we* calls it—but I can't tell you much about 'im. He took me into a cookshop in Shoreditch once, an' guv me a 'a'porth o' puddin'. That's about all I remember o' father. He was al'ays gittin' nailed, s'far as I can make out, and now he's in the 'Moodies. Mother 'ad a lot on us to take care on. She worn't sich a bad old girl, 'cept when she got lushy an' whopped us, till she took up with another cove. Both on 'em turned against us then. We was bundled out. Some was older and some was younger than me. Poor Jack were jst a year older. No, miss, I can't say what's come o' my brothers an' sisters, 'cept poor Jack an' Little Bill. We stuck together for a bit, luciferin' an' sich as that, but I never come acrost any on 'em now. Bill, I know, was killed; a dray druv over 'im in Brick

Lane. I was at the hinkquesht, and I couldn't 'elp blubberin' so that the gen'lemen guv me a 'alf-a-bull. I was wery fond o' little Bill. He were very fond o' me. He worn't much 'and at findin', but he'd go into the markit an' pick up what he could, when he see *I* were sharp-set. Yes, miss, you may call it *stealin'*; *findin'* we calls it. Me an' Jack went to a ken in Flower and Dcan Street, and we was wery 'appy there. Yes, miss, there's bad lan'gage an' bad hall sorts in them places; but I'd rayther not speak about it, please, miss. We boys and gals was all tumbled in together, an' could do pretty much as 'we liked; but Jack al'ays looked out arter me. He'd whop me if he thought I wanted to go wrong, an' I didn't s'long as I 'ad 'im. He worn't so pertic'lar about hisself, poor Jack; but then he were sich a good-lookin' chap, that it ain't wonderful the gals was arter 'im. But he never took up wi' any on 'em, so as to send me off. I was very comf able wi' poor Jack! He was game, an' no mistake. *He'd* never come back hempty-'anded—sumfink or other he'd bring—'an'kerchers, or sawney, or 'ens an' chickens, or sumfink. What's *they*? Them's the potses' pewters, miss; cats an' kittens some calls 'em. Sometimes I'd work wi' 'im; but poor Jack were a queer sort o' cove. He didn't mind what he did hisself, but he didn't like, some'ow to see *me* a-doing it. Law bless you, miss, it's heasy to get rid o' thinx. Grub an' sich as that we could sell at the ken; and there's other places 10r other thinx round about the Lane, an' helsevheres, an' no kevestions axed; on'y it ain't much ye gits. No,

miss, I can't say as I felt mis'able. I was wery 'appy wi' Jack. When we was in luck we 'ad jolly blow-outs, and went hevery night to the gaffs, or a 'op, or the theaytre. Poor Jack were wery kind to me. Yes, miss, I s'pose it were wrong some'ow livin' like that, helse Jack wouldn't a-been nailed; but it worn't like what I am now. I'm sick an' tired o' *that*, I am. But poor Jack were al'ays too wenturesome. The slops spotted 'im. He were in trouble lots o' times, but he knew how to get round the beaks, Jack did. He'd be wery respectful, an' pitch 'em a yarn about the destitooshun o' them as he 'ad to provide for, an' plead guilty to save their washups' time; an' so he used to get off wi' a month, an' horfen not that. I'd 'ard lines when Jack was away, but I al'ays managed to 'av sumfink 'ot for 'im when he come out, an' I used to git it on the square, too, to humour 'im—he were sich a queer sort o' cove. An' I was al'ays up at the jug; an' warn't we jolly when we got fair houtside them hugly big gates, though the warders was a-scowlin' as if they'd like to collar 'im back agin! There's a public right opposite, an' as soon as he had kissed me we used to march across, right afore the warders, as bold as brass, jest as if we was a se-vell cove an' 'is gal; an' I stood a pot, an' Jack 'ad it hall to 'is own cheek—leastways, I wanted 'im, but he never would—an' didn't he enjy it, an' 'is pipe? Then back we come, an' 'ad our tripe, or whatever it was. I can't abide the taste o' tripe now. Poor Jack were *too* wentursome, an' got sent to the sessions, an' they guv

'im five years; an' now I don't seem to belong to nobody.'

Here the poor girl seems to have burst into an hysterical passion of tears. Presently she went on: 'You're too good, miss, to so much as look at sich as me; but it's soothin' like, it is, only to set eyes on *you*, speakin' so soft, an' smilin' so kind, miss, an' as if you wasn't afraid o' my dirtyin' on ye. Yes, miss, I've been hinside a church once or te-vice; not horfener. It guv me the 'orrors; they was all so still, an' looked so solemn, an' each time I heared about what was to 'appen to folks like me: fire an' brimstone, 'an sich like. It scared me awful; and yet I wish I was dead, I do. What's poor gals sich as me to do? If I worn't to be gay, 'ow could I live? That's pretty well all I know, 'cept findin', an' I ain't much 'and at that. No, miss, I never heared anythink like that afore. Christ Jesus must have been a kind gen'leman if he talked like that. Yes, miss, please, I should like to 'ear some more o' that.'

When Miss Bertha had finished reading about Him who opened the kingdom of heaven to publicans and harlots, she prayed with the poor girl, and then she got to bed. Miss Bertha's plan was to find her some place in the country, where she would be quite removed from all her old associates and associations; but when this was mentioned to Mary, next morning, she pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to stay with her benefactress, that Miss Bertha, against her own judgment, consented to

give her a trial in town. She should go astray again, she felt sure, she said, if she had not Miss Bertha to keep her straight. The ragged finery in which she had shivered the night before had been put aside, and in the evening, comfortably and modestly clad, she went to church under Miss Bertha's escort. Her veil was down. No one knew her. The service no longer gave her the horrors, although it made her cry pretty freely. When she went to bed that night, she seemed in so fair a way of recovering her 'right mind,' that Miss Bertha began to rejoice as one who has folded a lost sheep.

Next day Mary was set to such household work as she could do without being exposed to notice, or having her new-born love of 'honest work' too severely taxed; and all the week long she behaved so well, and worked so cheerfully, that even Hannah began to look upon her with a less frigid eye. More sanguine Miss Bertha jumped to the conclusion that she had now nothing to fear for her *protégée*; and on the Saturday evening, when Hannah had gone out shopping, and no one was likely to call, determined to strengthen Mary's good resolutions by giving her a proof of her confidence. 'Mary,' she said, 'I am going out for a little while. Come to the door if you hear my knock, for Hannah has taken the key, and I expect I shall be back before she is.'

But when Miss Bertha got home, it was Hannah who let her in. 'Why, where's the girl, ma'am?' Hannah asked anxiously.

'Mary, do you mean? In the kitchen, isn't she?'

‘No, *that* she ain’t, ma’am, nor in this house. I thought you’d took her out with you.’

Miss Bertha could not believe that Mary had fled, until she had searched the house from top to bottom. In a closet in the girl’s bed-room the clothes that had been lent her were huddled in a heap, as she had thrown them down to put on once more her tawdry rags. Dark though the night was, Miss Bertha instantly started for the lodging-house at which the girl had last lodged, but the people there professed to have heard and seen nothing of her for a week. There was no other clue, unless the police were applied to ; and it might have done more harm than good to put them upon her track. Miss Bertha had to content herself with inquiries, and careful scrutiny of those she passed in her after-dusk rambles. But weeks rolled on, and Mary had vanished as people can vanish in this huge London.

One evening, however, when Miss Bertha was sitting alone, having sent out Hannah, and the little maid she was then training for service, to a dissolving-views exhibition a few streets off, the door-bell faintly rung. It was a very timid tinkle, but it had told its tale. Miss Bertha rushed to the door with a presentiment of whom she should find there. ‘On the step stood Mary trembling. ‘Oh, miss, *may* I come in, *hif* it’s on’y for five minutes?’ she cried. ‘I’ve been ‘angin’ about for an hour an’ more, but I didn’t like to ring till I’d watched Mrs ‘Anner hout.’

I need not say that Mary was admitted, and then she

told her story—how a sudden longing for a ‘free life’ once more had come upon her when she was left alone, and whilst it was still strong she had changed her clothes, and hurried from her bright little asylum into the homelessness of the cheerless night—how ever since she had been wandering about London like a ghost, scarcely ever sleeping twice beneath the same roof—how she soon loathed worse than ever the life to which she had returned, and was ‘fit to kill herself’ for returning to it, but until then had been ashamed to venture near the house again. She finished off by dropping on her knees and imploring Miss Bertha to forgive her, and give her one chance more. ‘If you don’t, miss, I must make a ‘ole in the water,’ she sobbed. ‘The streets seems a ‘undred thousand times wuss since I’ve known you. I *will* be a good gal, miss, indeed, indeed, I will!’

Miss Bertha told Mary that it was not *her* forgiveness that need be asked, and when she had calmed the hysterical girl, she consented to take her into her service again for a time, on condition that at the end of her trial *she* would consent to take a place to be found for her in the country. Poor Mary begged hard to be allowed to stay ‘for ever’ in her recovered home; but, after what had happened, Miss Bertha, for Mary’s sake, would have liked to send her into the country at once, if that could have been done with justice to the family to which she was to be sent.

The time of probation was rather a hard time to Mary. Miss Bertha was more tenderly kind than ever, but she

could not feel so confident as before, and therefore was not quite so confiding. Hannah very openly showed her distrust, and would not leave Mary alone with the little maid for a moment, for fear, as Hannah plainly said, she should 'corrupt her morals.' Mary went through her probation bravely, however, and Miss Bertha's hopes once more mounted high. The place in the country was secured, and the day fixed for Mary's departure.

But, the night before, Mary slipped out of the house once more, and took with her a little gold hair-brooch which Mrs Hannah wore proudly on her Sunday black silk, and proudly stuck in her pin-cushion in her bedroom all the rest of the week.

Miss Bertha could not help feeling indignant when she heard about the brooch, and Hannah was *so* indignant (for the hair in the brooch was a lock from the head of the young man whose death had made Hannah an old maid), that she wanted to start at once to Leman Street police-station. 'If Sergeant Dunaway's there,' said Hannah, 'he'll soon find the hussy out, wherever she's hidin'.'

But Miss Bertha stopped her.

'No, Hannah,' said Miss Bertha. 'I can't tell you how grieved I am about all this ; but don't let us make bad worse. You have been rather hard on Mary, and that is the way she has taken her revenge. It is very mean, but you must remember the way the poor creature was brought up. I must say that I feel disappointed, but nature cannot be changed in a month. I will make

good your money loss. I know that that is doing very little, because you valued your brooch for other reasons ; but, mark my words, Hannah, you'll get your brooch back again. There is something hearty about poor Mary at bottom, though she has behaved so, and she'll be ashamed of herself. I wish I could feel as sure that we should see her back herself.'

'Oh, ma'am,' cried Hannah, made still more indignant by the screening of the culprit, 'it ain't only myself that I'm vexed about, though I won't deny that I did vally the brooch more than money 'ull pay me. I'm vexed that you, ma'am, as means so well, an' acts so kind, should be *took in* so TWICE OVER !'

'Until seventy times seven, Hannah,' was Miss Bertha's answer : and when Hannah told me of it, she lapsed for once into the Cockneyism she loftily abhorred, and exclaimed, 'She's a *hange!*, sir !'

Miss Bertha was right in her prediction as to the brooch : at least, a few days afterwards, Hannah received an envelope, superscribed in a professional 'screever's' hand, containing a pawnbroker's duplicate for the brooch, and the small amount for which it had been pawned, and a little more, in postage-stamps.

But for nearly a year Miss Bertha heard nothing of poor lost Mary.

Late on a dreary December day she was passing a corner of Wentworth Street, when a broad-shouldered mulatto woman almost ran against her in the blinding snow. 'Ain't you Miss Bertha, mum ?' said the woman.

‘I’ve been to your house, and was going home again, because I couldn’t find you. Will you please to come along with me? There’s a poor gal at the house where I’m lodgin’ says she knows you, an’ can’t die easy unless she sees you.’

A Wentworth Street lodging-house is a place that a good many women, and men too, would shrink from entering, on such invitation, on a winter evening; but Miss Bertha had no fear, and really had very little reason for fear in those parts—they were included in her wide parish. ‘Is her name Mary C——?’ was all she asked. ‘Anyhow, they call her pretty Poll,’ the mulatto woman answered; and then Miss Bertha instantly followed her. They dived into a little square black lobby, a foot or so below the level of the street; the mulatto woman pushed open a swing-door with her broad shoulder, and led Miss Bertha through a low-pitched, dirty gas-lit and fire-lit room, in which men and women, boys and girls, were eating, drinking, smoking, cooking, singing, squabbling, brooding, with their elbows planted on the tables, snoring on the forms, and larking over them. Those who knew Miss Bertha made uncouth, but most cordial obeisance as she brushed by, those who didn’t know her asked gruffly or grinningly, ‘Who’s *she*?’ and were promptly answered, ‘She’s a good un. Come, now, you shut up while *she’s* ’ere.’ The mulatto woman led Miss Bertha up a cramped staircase, that twisted like a corkscrew, into a long, low room, lighted by one guttering dip stuck into a porter-bottle: and on one of a long row of low truckle beds, on

a filthy, flabby flock-mattress, beneath a coverlet darker than the mulatto and far dirtier, lay poor Mary, with almost all the prettiness pinched by want and sickness out of her once plump face. Her feverish eyes, that seemed to fill more than half of the pale, pinched face, blazed like lamps; they gave a gleam of gratitude when they fell upon Miss Bertha, and then they turned away shame-stricken, and the coverlet tossed like muddy water as poor Mary sobbed beneath it. When the mulatto had given Miss Bertha an old egg-box to sit upon, she went below. She knew very little of Mary, and was not particularly concerned about her; but the mulatto had been born in the Bermudas, and happening to hear from Mary that her father was a convict there, the woman had taken a passing interest in her. There were plenty down below who were eager to run for a cab when they learnt that Miss Bertha wanted one; and the mistress of the house was as willing to lend her cleanest—comparatively cleanest—blankets to wrap Mary in, when she found that Miss Bertha was going to take the doubtfully solvent lodger home. Miss Bertha had a keen sense of humour, which the gloomiest circumstances could not dull; and when she saw that the blankets were branded, ‘Stolen from —, Wentworth Street,’ she could not help asking whether she had not better leave a deposit. ‘I’ll trust *you* with ‘em, miss,” said the landlady, laughing back; and she helped the mulatto woman to carry Mary to the cab.

Miss Bertha nursed Mary through the winter, and

Hannah at last helped in the nursing heartily, although at first she only gave her help from a rigidly conscientious sense of duty. Poor Mary was so patient and so grateful; she was so often near death, and that solemnising experience so manifestly deepened and directed her longings for the only forgiveness that can avail, and the only peace that can endure. She had a hard fight for life, but when the old lilac once more put out its apology for blossom, Mary was out in the back garden too, looking almost as sickly, but with far better promise peeping through her faint colour. Miss Bertha, and Hannah also, had by that time grown so fond of the girl that both wanted to keep her with them, and so far as her moral health was concerned, she might probably have been kept with perfect safety. For the sake of her physical health, however, Miss Bertha obtained her a farm-house place in Essex, as soon as she was strong enough to stand the work. Miss Bertha paid her fare when she was able to come up to town for a little holiday, and met her at the Shoreditch Terminus. Poor Jack had been found out before then, and both visited him in prison. He was very grateful to Miss Bertha, and used to lecture his sister with most edifying propriety. He confessed, however, to Miss Bertha—although he would not, in his own phrase, ‘cotton to the parson’—that he thought it was a ‘flier’ after all, to do things ‘upon the square.’

The son of the ‘looker’ at the farm fell in love with Mary, and Mary fell in love with him. ‘But, oh, miss,’

sobbed poor Mary, 'it ain't fair not to tell him what I've been.' The intelligence, mercifully as Miss Bertha communicated it, was a great shock to the honest looker's son, but his love survived the shock. 'I don't care what you say she's been,' he cried angrily, as if Miss Bertha were in fault; 'I know what Mary is now, and I'll have her, say what you like against her—so there, now.' He even condoned Mary's 'belongings,' deceased and surviving. 'It warn't poor Mary's fault,' he indignantly argued, 'if she come of a bad lot—*she'd* never have gone wrong if she'd had common looking after. And as for that poor Jack, he was in the same boat, and he's a real good sort, after all, according to your account, ma'am. *He* cared for my poor Mary, when nobody else didn't—not but what I'm most thankful to you, ma'am, as I've good reason. If it hadn't been for you, me and her would never ha' come together. But I don't like to hear a word said against her, and not be able to pitch into them as says it. So I know you'll forgive me, ma'am, and again I thank you kindly.'

A few weeks after poor Jack came out of prison, he and his sister and the looker's son started for Port Natal together. The looker's son paid Mary's passage-money, for she was then his wife; and Miss Bertha, who was not so rich as she had been, got her clerical lover to help her in paying poor Jack's. Miss Bertha went down to Gravesend to bid the little party good-bye before their barque got under way. Poor Jack was still a little bit of a Pharisee, and when he saw his sister and her friend

crying over one another, he loftily remarked, 'Don't distress yourself, miss, Mary's got *me* to look after her now!' a speech which made her husband, who, with good reason, was convinced that Mary required no looking after, scowl blackly on his brother-in-law. But the three hung over the bulwarks very amicably together, waving their hands as if they wanted to dislocate their shoulders, whilst the *D'Urban's* topsails filled and Miss Bertha's boat pulled back to the Terrace Pier.

Many such stories have I heard of Miss Bertha. Her old clients still speak fondly of her, although her power to give them pecuniary aid failed before she left the East-end. She lost almost all her money through the depreciation of the railway shares in which the greater part of her property was invested, and the fraud of the trustees of the minor moiety. But she got a good husband, a working clergyman, rather poorer than herself, and is now working with him in a dirty Lancashire town, as heartily and as cheerfully as she worked in Spitalfields and Bethnal Green.

XXVIII.

PEGGY'S HAVEN.

WILL you be pleased to tell me, sir, if it's all right? I've took my ticket for Shadwell, but they says I must get out here. I ain't used to railways, sir. Last time I was this way, I'm certain sure the train ran right on.

I gave the requisite explanation, and my querist began to apologise both for troubling me and for letting herself be troubled: 'These changes is confusin' to an old 'ooman that ain't used to travelling. Seems as if we was allus changin' on this line, now. As soon as you've settled down a bit comfortable, and gets anywheer, they cries out, "Change here" for somewheer else. Ah, well, that's like life, too,—allus a-changin'; and *that's* wisely ordered. We should go to sleep and forget ourselves, if we wasn't made to look alive.'

Not quite satisfied even yet, however, she added, after a little talk about the weather: 'Here's my ticket, sir. I can make out the big print, but the little letters is too

small for my old eyes. And yet, p'raps, they's the ones I ought to read. That's like life, again—ain't it, sir?'

It was at the Bow Station of the North London Railway that I was thus questioned by a puzzled but cheery old woman, with shrewd and yet soft blue eyes, hair as white as bleached wool, and little streaks of healthy colour on her wintry cheeks, that looked like haws peeping out of snow. She wore an old-fashioned blue-and-white checked gown, an old-fashioned, faded lavender shawl, and a rusty-black velveteen poke-bonnet, under which could be seen a crimped mob-cap. There was nothing uncommon in her perplexity on that line of many changes, but there *was* something uncommon in the calm mode in which she moralised her bewilderment. I felt curious to learn something about her, and so, when the branch train for Fenchurch Street backed into the station, and I had overcome her scruples as to whether that would stop at Shadwell by assuring her that I was going to Shadwell myself, I handed her into a carriage, somewhat to the old lady's amusement.

'It's jest as if I had a young man again,' she said, with a quiet little laugh. 'Poor feller!' she went on, in a sadder tone, 'my old man was as tall as you, and would ha' made two of yer across the shoulders. An' my boys was the werry moral of their father. Theer's only one on 'em left now, an' I haven't seen him this ten years.'

After a little pause, I inquired, 'But perhaps you have a daughter to cheer you?'

'No, sir, I've got no daughters—I had once, but they're gone, too. If it wasn't for Sam, I should be all alone in the world, like a scarecrow in a bean-field. Well, p'raps I mayn't be quite as ugly as a scarecrow; but I should feel as lonely sometimes, if it wasn't for Him as has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."' "

'And have you travelled far?' I asked.

'No, sir, not for them as is used to travellin', but it seems a long way to me now-a-days. I've come from 'Ampstead this afternoon. I'd heerd that a family as know'd me when I was a gal was livin' theer, an' so I trotted off to the City an' rode up on a 'bus. Yes, sir, you're right—it 'ud ha' been cheaper if I'd known I could take a return from Shadwell. But theer was no railway to 'Ampstead in my time—you went by the stages then—an' I never asked till I got theer. That's like life; if we trusts to ourselves, we mostly gets our wisdom too late.'

'Well, but I hope you've had a pleasant journey,' I put in.

'Thankye for wishing it, but I can't say I have, sir. When I got to the house, I'd had my journey for nothing. It's one of them big red houses, with trees and walls, and great iron gates, you see about that way, and 'Ighgate, an' Clapton. They looks more like gentlefolks' houses, to my mind, than the little white bits o' things that's run up now-a-days. Theer's room to turn about in 'em. What wi' the willas, an' the new inns, an' the brickfields,

and the railway, an' that, 'Ampstead seemed like a new place. "The fashion of this world passeth away." That's a true saying. You're verry polite, sir, but you say what's true, though it's no credit o' mine, kind folks. The family as I went to see *would* ha' been glad to see me, I think. P'raps, though, all as knowed me would ha' been gone. Anyhow, there was a great black board, with "To Let" on it, over the gates. I made out the name of the gentleman as has to let the house, and made bold to ask about 'em, and they've been gone this six months. It *was* a disapp'intment, for I've not had a soul to speak to as knows anything about me for this ever so long.'

'But surely you have some friends or neighbours to speak to occasionally?' I said.

'Of course, I've neighbours, sir, and kind folks amongst 'em, I don't doubt. I hope you won't think me unneighbourly, sir. How should I ever ha' got on if I hadn't had kind friends over and over again! But the folks about wheer I live is always a-coming and going like flies. Hows'ever theer's a world wheer theer's no movin', thank God, if we can but get theer. I ask your pardon, sir,' abruptly added the old lady, who had rolled down upon my shoulder, as the train ran, all on one side, into the Stepney Junction. 'The railway gentlemen seems determined we shouldn't go to sleep. It ain't quite pleasant to be shook about like that; but then, you see, if I was goin' to stop at Stepney, an' had been a-noddin', I should ha' been glad to be woke up. All

things has two handles. It's like life, too, it is. Jest now we was a-runnin' on level, an' now I'm up in the world, and you're down, you see.'

The cheerful, lonely old philosopher I had stumbled upon took my fancy. When we got out at Shadwell I walked down to the High Street with her, and when we parted at the corner of King David Lane I had obtained her address and permission to call upon her.

'Peggy M—— is my name, you'll remember,' were her parting instructions; 'an' it's the first door to the right on the top floor back. I call it my Haven, for a kind of joke like. My old man was in the seafarin' line, and I've been werry happy in my way up theer. It's nice to have a home o' your own, if it's only a nutshell.'

On a calm May evening I turned down New Gravel Lane, *en route* for Peggy's Haven. Squalid East-enders hung on the drawbridges, looking dreamily down into the muddy dock water, and drinking in the faint breeze that blew over it in sleepy little sighs. A church bell hard by was tolling the curfew. There was a blue sky overhead. The fancy, no doubt, was suggested by the name of the place to which I was bound, but it seemed to me that I had never before seen such an approach to peace in that unhomely region of roughs. Turning out of the Lane by King Street and Green Bank (when did grass last grow there?), I worked my way round to the Wapping court, to which I had been directed, and so up to the top floor back. 'Mind your head, sir,' said Peggy as I went in—a necessary caution, since the roof in some

places came down almost to the floor. 'Theer now, you can stand up straight and look about you. And first I'll show you something that'll surprise you. Jest come and have a look out at the window.'

I went towards her, but all that I could see at first was a by no means surprising prospect of grimy tiles, jagged chimney-pots, and a dreary reach of high drab dock wall, with here and there a tall mast towering above it.

'No, it's down in the back yard I mean,' the old woman said, pointing her finger in the direction.

I looked down, and saw a black, crooked old apple tree smothered in pink and white blossom.

'Theer, ain't that a lovely sight?' she asked with enthusiasm. 'I was country-born, and it glads my eyes, it do, to see them beautiful blooms. Sometimes I can't sleep, and when I gets out of bed, and looks at 'em in the moonlight, it seems like as if it was a angel a-watch-ing of me. It was very good 'of Him as is allus good to let me have my apple-tree. I call it mine, though it ain't mine, and I shouldn't get many apples off it, if it was. But I get what's better than apples. When things is looking a bit black in winter, I thinks—well so does the apple-tree, but it'll be bright again come spring. It don't seem to have a bit more life in it then than an old birch broom, but out it comes every year like that. The flowers is as fresh as the first year it blowed. And the butterflies comes, and the bees, too, sir, though you mightn't think it; and I could fancy myself a little gal again, down in Kent. It keeps my heart young some-

how, that tree do. I feel like as if it was a shame for me, as have the use of my limbs, an' can get about, to be a-mopin' and a-croakin', when that poor crooked thing, stived up in that smoky mite of a yard, puts out them beautiful flowers to cheer up everybody about. It may be my fancy, but I really do think that the children is quieter, and the women don't quarrel half so much, when the blossom's on the tree.

' But come, sir, sit ye down, an' let me give you a cup of tea,' she went on, turning away towards the table. ' I was jest a goin' to have one when you knocked. I've done work for to-day. Theer's such a plenty of daylight this blessed weather. I should never need to light a match, if it wasn't to bile my kettle. Poor folk ought to thank God for the summer; but then He made the winter too, and if we'd allus summer, we shouldn't vally it, I suppose. P'raps we might get sick on it, as they say the grocers' boys does of the figs. It somehow seems strange to me at times that we want fires, an' that worst when it's hardest for us poor folk to get 'em, but theer's a wise meanin' in that, I don't doubt, if I could only come at it. We've a good God, and so theer must be somethin' good in everything He lets be. I've found out good in so many things I used to think couldn't be good nohow, that when a thing seems queer to me now, I says, "Peggy, it ain't the thing as is in fault—it's you as can't get hold o' the right handle."'

Whilst Peggy thus expounded her optimist creed, she had been coaxing, with what seemed in comparison a

very big pair of bellows, a very little fire in a very little grate to boil a very little kettle.

‘Why, the werry bellus,’ she went on, ‘might teach folk that it all depends on which handle you get up’ards. If you turns ’em the wrong way, they does nothing but garsp like a fish out o’ water. It’s singin’ nicely now. I likes to hear a kittle sing. It’s company to a lonely old ’ooman. It seems good-natured like of the kittle—as if it knew you was wantin’ your tea, and so give you a song while you was waitin’. I should like to keep a bird, but they cost too much, pretty dears. My Sam gave me a parrot once. It went against my heart to get rid of it, though it did use to scream fit to deafen me. But I might almost as well ha’ had a child to keep, an’ I couldn’t abear to stint it; an’ so I had to sell it in the ’Ighway. Poor old Poll! I used to feel ashamed like when I went by the shop. I couldn’t abear to go by without lookin’ in at the window; and the bird was jest as if he was hurt in his feelin’s when he see me. He used to look at me out o’ the side of his eyes, as if he was a-sayin’, “No, I shan’t take no notice of you. It’s no use your a-shamming to care about me. Your Sam didn’t bring me home for you to sell.” I felt half glad when the bird was gone, and yet it was lonely, too, not seein’ him. But now, if you’ll excuse me, sir, I’ll make the tea. A spoonful a cup, and another for the pot, they say, but that’s like a good many of our sayin’s, two words for ourselves. My pot don’t often get his allowance when I’ve not got no company, but *he* don’t care

about it. I wonder how 'tis that we try to make-believe that way.'

Whilst the tea was 'set to draw' upon the hob, Peggy pondered this question. The worthy old soul apparently prided herself on giving satisfactory explanations of unsatisfactory anomalies. Not succeeding in this instance, she poured out the tea, and went on.

'Well, now, sir, I take this werry kindly of you. I haven't had a friend to tea not for I can't remember how long. The tea tastes nicer, seems to me, when you've got somebody to talk to. Is yours to your likin', sir? You was sayin', when I had the pleasure o' seein' you the other day, that you'd like to hear a bit about my life. Suppose I tell ye now. But you're not going to put it in print, are ye, sir? Not that I've got anything partic'lar to be ashamed of, though there ain't many lives, I reckon, that would bear to be all wrote out; but the folks about here would think it bumptious of me if they was to see it. They're not likely to if you don't put into *Reynolds's* or *Lloya's*—they're the papers that is mostly took in these parts. Still if you do print it, sir, please don't give my name or the name of the court. Name in full, I mean—theer's plenty of lonely old Peggys in Wapping, I guess. If you'd like to smoke a cigar, sir, don't you mind me. It'll be dull sittin' an' doin' nothin' but listenin' to a tire-some old 'ooman, an' it'll be homely like to smell 'baccy up here again. My Sam used to set wheer you're a-settin', an' have his pipe of a evening. That's right, sir. Now you looks at home. What a nice smell them cigars have.

It makes me think o' the hops. I was born down among the hops. We had 'em all round us at Watlingtonbury. You've seen a hop-field? I don't think there's a prettier sight, when the dew's on the leaves and the bunches. It's cold work, though, sometimes when you begin to pick of a morning. I've picked when they tallied two, and when they tallied ten to the shillin', and I think I earned most when they tallied ten. You see you hadn't to spend your time a huntin' for 'em. It's easy to get hold o' the smooth handle in *that* trouble. I used to like hopping, though the wild Irish skeered me awful at times. They camp out under the hedges, and fight fit to kill each other sometimes o' Saturday nights. Some o' the Londoners, too, is a werry rough lot—tramps an' that—an' there's sad goin's on in the barns wheer they all pigs together—leastways they used to in my time. But it's a blessin' for poor Londoners is hoppin'. You see, they gets the fresh country air, as well as the money. It's like an 'oliday. When the hoppers from these parts is comin' home, I go down to the Tunnel Pier to see 'em come ashore, wi' their bunches in their hats, and they mostly gives me a bit when I asks them. There's some fine goldings over the mankle-shelf. It minds me of old times. I didn't think, when I used to see the yellow-faced folk come down to Watlingtonbury, that I should ever come to London to live ; but I'm a Londoner myself now—leastways I've lived somewheer or other in London almost all my life. I used to think, from what I heerd talk, that it 'ud choke me if I was to live a week in it,

but London air's nateral to me now. I expect I should feel all abroad like if I was to go wheer theer was no lamps. P'raps the dough thinks it can't stand the oven, but it bakes for all that. Wheer God means folks to live, He helps 'em to live ; and so I've lived this many a year in London, though it's been hard work many a time.

'I don't suppose you ever knew, sir, what it was to wonder wheer you'd get bread for to-morrow's breakfast. Well, sir, I've felt that many a time, and when I'd got hungry little mouths to fill. That's ever so much worse than bein' hungry yourself. "Why did you have me, if you can't keep me?" the little uns seem to say. But I've felt it so often, and yet somehow things has come round—p'raps not next day—though they has many a time, but if not, soon enough to keep me from starvin'—that it wouldn't trouble me now. When I've said my prayers at night, that day's finished, and I can go to sleep—least-ways when I hain't got the face-ache. Next day is as God shall please. I can trust Him now, I thank God, an' whatever turns up is better than I deserve, an' has often been a deal better than I expected. "Theerfore take no thought, sayin', What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wheerwithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gintiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Ain't they beautiful words? I thank God I ain't a Gintile now, though I used to was. Him as said 'em hadn't wheer to lay his head, an' I never was so bad off as that. We poor folks ought to thank God that

Jesus Christ wasn't a great gentleman. P'raps it wouldn't ha' been so easy to believe him if he had been ; but He knew what poor folk have to put up with—not that I was never in no manner o' want whilst my old man was livin'. He was a bargeman when I first knew him, and I met him at Medstun Fair—*Maidstone*, you calls it, sir? Well, I was born close by, and *we* always called it *Medstun*. Anyhow, the fair was held down by the river. P'raps it's done away wi' now. They're puttin' down the fairs, I hear, an' a good thing, too ; for foolish young gals often gets into trouble at 'em. I don't mean myself. My John was too well-conducted for anything o' that, an' I hope I was too ; and to this day I can't help likin' to see the boats go out to Fairlop Fair. John and I went out to that the first year we was married, an' we walked about in the Forest for all the world as if we'd jest begun sweet-heartin'. He was 'allus a dear, kind soul, was John. But mother, somehow, got set against him. She'd got a notion that all men in the seafarin' line was a bad lot ; an' when he walked over to Wateringbury a-purpose to see me, she wouldn't give us a chance, an' so I used to meet him unbeknown to mother. Father allus liked John.

'P'raps it was wrong o' me to go against mother's wish ; and yet I don't know. God puts the love in our hearts, an' when theer's nothin' in reason to be said agin the man, I expect we ought to follow love's leadin's though they *are* our own likin's. To get me out o' John's way, mother got me a place in a werry kind family of our parts

that was goin' up to London—the grandfather of the gentleman as I'd been to see the other day, and *he* lived at 'Ampstead too. I'd been theer a year an' more before John found me out. They were all uncommon kind to me, an' I'd begun to think if John didn't trouble himself about me, I wouldn't trouble myself about him. I didn't know what pains he'd took to find me out, poor fellow, trampin' about when his work was done. I was a giddy young gal then, and folks called me pretty—and young or old, ordinary or not ordinary, a woman don't like to be thought little on. But one day when I was passin' Jack Straw's Castle, who should come out o' the tap but my John ! He was never a drinkin' man, and allus went to church, when he'd got the chance ; but, you see, he'd been in theer to make his inquiries. Up he come to me, the great big feller, an' without a with-your-leave or by-your-leave, he hugged me in both his 'arms, and, shame-faced as I was, I couldn't help kissin' him back. I'm an old 'ooman now, and don't mind saying of it. It's nice to get back what you'd thought you wasn't goin' to see again, however lightly you've brought yourself to think you'd come to vally it. We walked over the 'Eath, and past the Spaniards, an' up 'Ighgate Lane, and it wasn't till we had got to 'Ighgate Gate House that I remembered I'd been sent of a errand. John walked back with me, and afore we parted, he made me let him put up the banns down here at St. George's.

'I lost a good place, and though they give me lots o' things, they was angry with me for going ; but I got a

good husband, an' I've never repented marryin' him from that day to this. He never laid a finger on me, and was werry kind, too, to father and mother afore they died. We lived in Southwark then. John's barge used to come up to one o' the wharfs in Shad Thames. But one day the barge come back without John. My eldest boy had begun to pick up odd jobs on the river, an' he come back an' said, 'Oh, mother, the *Amity's* moored, but they say father fell overboard off Gravesen'. One o' them teakittles ran into her, an' father's lying dead by the windlass;' and then the poor boy fell a-cryin' as if his heart would break. They was all werry fond of their father, an' they'd reason to. He'd tell 'em stories, and gammock wi' them, however tired he was. That was a bitter day to me, sir. My poor John's been buried in St. Saviour's churchyard this many a day, but I feel fit to cry when I see the old church now. John was a Borough man, born and bred, an' he was werry proud of his church. He'd got a tale he used to tell the little uns about it. It warn't allus called St. Saviour's, he said, but after a young lady that had made a fortun' in ferryin' folk across the river afore the bridge was built, an' so she give her money for the church to be built. That must ha' been a weary while ago. Fortuns ain't made a-ferryin' now-a-days. Anyhow, it was a good use to put the money to, an' I think the young lady must be glad they've changed the name. It sounds more Christian like. *I'm* glad it's St. Saviour's. Seems as if the blessed Saviour took care o' John's body on earth as well as his soul in

heaven. I wish I could be buried along wi' him, but that can't be—they don't bury theer now. After all, what does it matter wheer I'm put? Jesus 'll find me, I humbly hope, whereever it is. Theer's nothing to mark John's grave now, but I know wheer it is, an' give it a look when I go by. At odd times I get my taties at the Borough Market, when I can spare time to go so far. I don't know that the regents is better theer than elsewheers, but I likes to buy 'em now and then. It minds me o' the times when I went marketin' wi' John. He would allus go along wi' me when he was at home. He wasn't goin' to have his wife pushed about by a lot o' low fellers, he said. He was werry proud of his wife, was my poor John. They're a rough lot uses the market now, but they never interferes wi' me. Still it's lonely—though I can't help goin' now and then—to be theer all by myself. But it's nice to think John ain't far off. Since my Sam went away, John's grave's all that belongs to me in London.

'Theer's not one o' my children, dead or alive, in London now, though I was left wi' seven of them, five boys an' two gals. They was dear good children, though, when I had 'em, an' I expect to meet 'em all some day. It ain't Sam's fault, I know, that I hain't seen him all these years. It's three years since I had a letter from him, but I don't think much o' that. It ain't strange that letters from furrin' parts should go astray to an old 'ooman like me. The Queen's gentlemen has something else to do than to find out wheer old Peggy

lives. Though they *did* bring me six, jest as if I was a lady. Sometimes I can't help thinkin' that my poor Sam's dead like his brothers, and then agin I *hope* so that he ain't, that I won't believe God as is so good would let me hope so jest to be disapp'inted. P'raps, though, that ain't right. It's easy to want to have your own way, an' to fancy yourself religious for wishing of it. I don't suppose the Wirgin Mary ever expected to see her Blessed Son a-hangin' on the cross, but she did see him theer, an' it was God's will or He wouldn't ha' let it be. She'd got some one to take her home, though—not as I could feel to one as didn't belong to me azackly as I does to my own flesh and blood. Anyhow, she'd got the blessed John, as her Son had been so fond on, to look after her, an' so she wasn't all alone in the world. The good people we read on in the Bible felt jest as we do, don't you think, sir? I like to fancy so. It makes the Bible read so much nicer—as if you wasn't shut outside it somehow, and was only a-lookin' in, as you might at a peepshow. Sam, you see, was my youngest—my little Benjamin. He was the baby when his father died, an' he'd been allus with me in our ups and downs till he went away to sea. We lived here an' we lived theer, an' I did this an' I did that; now we was in 'Oxton, and now we was in Bermondsey, and so all round about; and sometimes we was werry near the workus, but, I thank God, we somehow kep' out o' that. Thanks to the dear Lord, and the dear servants o' his He sent, jest as we was a-thinkin' we must go into the house i we

didn't want the parish to bury us—an' theer wouldn't ha' been much savin' of pride in that. Swearin' 's a bad, foolish habit—not, as I think, that many o' the poor folks as uses bad words *means* any more harm than you when you says "good mornin'"—but, will you believe me, sir? a swearin' man was one of the kindest friends I ever had. The biggest boys was here an' theer, jest makin' a shift to live, an' I was left wi' little Sam an' my two gals, Mary Ann an' Jemimer. We was livin' in one o' the little streets runnin' out o' the Old Bethnal Green Road then, an' me an' the gals had been doin' a little shoe-work. The boys, when they could, gave us a little lift—brought us a loaf or somethin' like that, if they went without themselves, poor fellers. They was all dear, good children, I thank God. But work went slack, an' the gals were settin' at home, tryin' to quiet little Sammy. He was hungry, poor little chap, and we was, too; but he hadn't the sense then to know that. I owed a fortnight's rent, an' jest when I was thinkin' however I was to pay it, in came the man to bother for it. He was a-tellin' me that I was a swindler to take a room I couldn't pay for, an' that I must bundle out with my beggar's brats, when up came the man that had the ground-floor—him an' the young woman as he lived with. He was a fightin' man, an' his language was 'orrid. But he paid my rent, an' the gal went down and brought up a loaf wi' a pound an' more of beef an' 'am crammed into it; and them two kep' us for a week till I got work again,—used to bring us beer, too,

an' the gal give Sammy hardbake. As soon as I got it, I went down wi' the money for the rent an' that. "You're sich a saint," he says, with an oath: "you're too proud to take a hobligation from folks like Sal an' me." "No, sir," I says; "I thank you an' the young lady from the werry bottom o' my heart; but it don't seem honest to let other folks pay for ye, when you can pay for yourself." "Well, if them's your feelin's," says he, "I'll take the money for the rent; but ——," and here he let out another oath,—“if I'm a-goin' to be paid for standin' treat.” An' he wouldn't neither, sir; an' the gal cried, an' said as she felt safer, somchow, wi' good folks as didn't look down on her in the house. Ah, them poor critturs! My heart bleeds for 'em, it do, when I go along the 'Ighway. To think they was all babies once! The 'Ighway and Tiger Bay I expect's wheer the blessed Lord would go to first if He was to come down to London. The harlots in his time heerd Him gladly, an' p'r'rps them poor things would. It 'ud be such a treat to them to be spoken to—by One like Him, too—as if they'd got a chance left. Oh, it's a 'orrid 'life—you can't wonder much they get drunk to forget theirselves.

'I thank God my poor dear gals was never led astray; though they'd great temptations, livin' as we did, an' them so pretty, for all they was so pale an' pinched at times. A young doctor chap in the 'Ackney Road got my Jemimer to walk with him unbeknown to me. She used to work then by London Fields, an' he was allus

a-waitin' for her at the corner of Goldsmith's Row. No, sir, it warn't *a bit* like me an' my John. My John meant honest, and that ain't what this young feller meant. But my Jack—that was the eldest—was at home then, an' he found it out, an' skeared the young doctor. He was as big as his father, was my poor dear Jack, an' just the same sperrit, too,—as mild as milk mostly, but as fierce as a lion if anybody insulted them as he cared about. Both my gals married werry decent men, though they've never found time to write to me since the poor dear gals died. One of them went to Ameriky, an' the other to Australy, an' both on 'em died when their first babies was born. I should like to know if they're livin', an' how they're gettin' on. But then, you see, p'raps, the fathers is dead, an' if not, they've married agin, an' forgotten all about me. It's only nateral. Men don't marry their wives' mothers as well as their wives. My John was as kind as he could ever be to my mother, though she had been so hard on him; but then theer ain't many like my John.

'All my boys, except one, first or last, followed the sea. They pottered about a bit on shore, an' then they took to the water like young ducks. It was cheery when they used to come home, the great, big brown fellers, wi' their merry jokes, an' shells, an' things; but they're all gone now, 'cept Sam. I can't believe somehow that *he's* dead. My third boy, Tom, was the only one that didn't follow the sea, an' yet he's buried in it. He shot up like a young hop, an' he went for a sojer. He'd got no work,

an we hadn't got much jest then. So one mornin' he says to me, "Mother, I can't stand this—livin' on you this fashion;" and off he goes. When he comes back, he says, "I've been to Westminster, an' 'listed." It was in the East Injian army that he'd 'listed, an' he used to come up from Warley an' Brompton to see us when he was quartered theer, an' the gals was werry proud of his smart coat. But Tom would never walk out in it with 'em. He was partic'lar fond of his sisters, an' said that gals as was seen with a sojer was thought light on. Theer's no denying it, but it do seem hard that them as fights our battles should be looked down on. Theer's sojers in the Bible. Well, sir, my Tom went to Injy, an' he did well theer, too, I suppose. Anyhow, they made him a sergeant. Now an' again he sent me money, an' for the matter o' that, all my boys was werry good to me when they'd got their wages. At last I heerd that Tom was comin' home in a invalid ship. It did my heart good to think that I should see him any ways. Him and Sam was all I had left then, and Sam was away at sea, an' I was a bit down in the world. I asked a neighbour o' mine who understood sich matters to keep a look-out in the papers, an' as soon as he told me the ship had got home I went down to Gravesen'. The invalids was to land theer—Fort Pitt, I think, at Chatham's, the name o' the place wheer they was to go to. I paid a boatman, too, to row me aboard, though I could ill afford the money. An' when I got aboard, what do you think I heerd, sir? That my poor Tom had died when the ship

was three weeks out from Calcutta. They was all werry kind to me, both the officers and men, and spoke o' Tom as if he had been held in high respect. The officer that had chief charge of the sojers was an especial kind gentleman. "Your son," says he, "from what I've heerd on him, allus did his duty like an Englishman, an' he died like a Christian." That was werry comfortin', but still, you see, I'd been expectin' to see my boy. The gentleman put me in the way of getting his traps an' a trifle o' pay, but that wasn't my Tom. He was lying at the bottom of the sea, thousands o' miles away. I felt for a bit as if God had forsaken me, as I went up the river agin. I went ashore at London Bridge. I was takin' care of a empty house in the City then—it was in Jewin Street—an' the sun was shinin' even down in Thames Street, the windows was all blazin' in King William Street, an' the folks was bustlin' up to the 'buses at the Mansion House quite merry like. Seemed as if everything was bright 'cept me. When I got back I sat down on a box, an' put my apron over my head, an' cried as if I should burst. All of a sudden, jest as if some one had lifted up a corner of my apron, I heerd a whisper like. "Why don't you read your Bible, Peggy?" was what it said. It was layin' on the tea-chest I had for a table, an' when I caught hold on it, it seemed to open of itself. "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not"—them was the werry words my eyes fell on. I read all that beautiful bit, an' it comforted me—at first I didn't know

how. *My* son hadn't been raised up though I *was* a widdy. But then it all come upon me. Christ was as sorry for me as He was for her, but that wasn't His way of showin' of it. He'd taken my boy because it was best for us both ; an' yet He was jest as kind. He'd got him safe. After all, he'd have had to die again, when p'r'aps he warn't so fit for it. I might go to him, though he couldn't come to me. An' then I'd another good cry, an' then I made myself a cup of tea, an' felt as if I could go to work agin. Of course, I know it was all the grace of God, but it's wonderful what good a cup o' tea does you when you're down. That's one of his mercies, too, I reckon.

'About a year after that I come to live here, to be handy to some sewin' work I'd got ; and here I've lived ever since, an' have always had work, too, less or more. It's rough work, but then I can do it all the quicker like the hops, an' it don't try my eyes as fine work would—so theer's two smooth handles to *that* trouble. It ain't much I earn, but it's enough for me, as it comes in reg'lar. Folks talk against the Jews, but I've no fault to find wi' them. My master's a Jew, an' I've worked for him twelve years, come Michaelmas. Theer's good an' bad of all sorts, I guess. It seems wicked like to me to run down people wholesale i' that fashion. Wasn't it Jews as wrote the Bible? I should like to be able to put by enough to bury me, and to be able to see my dear Sam now an' then, an' then I shouldn't have another earthly wish about myself. But it ain't right to be so easy

satisfied. I wish I could do summut for my neighbours. I'm only a poor old 'ooman, I know, but everybody can do summut if they've only got the will. It's hard to get hold of the folks about here, though; they're allus a changin' so. It makes me dizzy to think o' them as has lived in this house—let alone this court—since I've been here. You can't make no acquaintance, for you're allus a-comin' on new faces. Why, at the chandler's wheer I get my things theer's been iour masters an' a missis since I've lodged here. I sometimes think it would ha' been less lonesome to be down at Wateringbury, wheer everybody knew me, leastways they would ha' knowd me, if I'd lived theer all my life. But I should be as strange there now as here. London's more of a home like than that 'ud be, lonesome as I am. It's a big, black, noisy place, an' I've known trouble in it, but I shouldn't like to leave it now till I go to the home that'll be home for ever. I've lived in it goin' on for sixty year, an' I was married here, an' my old man is buried here, and my children was all born here—leastways over in the Borough. After all, God's everywheer. Sometimes, when I lies awake at night listening to the clocks strikin' and chimin' the quarters, I thinks—Theer, for miles round theer's folks, an' not one on 'em would miss ye if you was to die afore mornin'. But then I thinks again—Well, what an' if they wouldn't? You wouldn't be the worse o', if you was safe with God; an' he's a watchin' over you now, black as it is, jest like the stars. He wouldn't forget ye because there's so many folks in London. Not

but what, when I go to church, an' see an old man come in wi' his old 'ooman, or an old mother a-leanin' on her son's arm, it gives me a prick like. But my Sam's been in this werry room, an' I hope to see him here again, please God, if I should live so long; an' I can fancy him a-settin' wheer you are, a-smokin' an' a-talkin'. He give me my cheer, and that chest o' drawers, an' them things for the chimbley. I'm most afraid to dust 'em for fear I should break 'em. I wish I could ha' kep' the parrot. An' if he should never come back, poor boy, or I should die afore he do, I shan't be left alone. I used to fancy somehow as if God was up above the sky, but since I've lived all by myself up here, 'specially when the rooms underneath has been empty, an' it made me a bit nervous to go out on the black staircase, when I've come in, and stirred up my fire, an' lit my candle, an' got my Bible, or gone down on my knees in the dark, I've felt as if He was close round about me a-takin' care of me.

'Well, sir, if you must be goin' you must. I can't expect you to stay here listenin' to an old 'ooman all night. But have another look at my apple-tree afore you go. Ah, you can't see much of it now, but you can feel like that it's a beauty, an' to-morrow you'll see it as plain as ever. There's a many things like that in life. Texts is—especially the promises. Well, good-night, sir—mind your head, sir. I take it werry kind of you that you've stayed so long; an' if you've five minutes to spare when you're anywheres hereabouts, if you'll give me a look, I'll thank ye kindly. You're pretty sure to find

me at home. 'My Peg makes her woyages, ridin' at anchor,' my John used to say. It was that that put it into my head to call this my Haven—not as I've got anybody to call it to ; but I talks to myself when I've got nobody else to talk to. Be sure you look in when you're passing. It does a lonesome old body good to have a soul to speak to in the way of a friend like.

I fully intended, when I left, to make a second pilgrimage very speedily to Peggy's Haven, but nothing for some months called me again into her part of the East-end, and the cheerful old creature, stitching away at the top of the squalid old house, all alone with her God, for a time completely faded out of my recollection. It was not until the following Christmas that I was reminded of her by seeing an old woman come out of a grocer's shop in Ratcliff Highway with a very tiny packet of tea-dust. As a peace-offering, I procured a little parcel of Christmas groceries, and once more struck down into Wapping. It was a dismal day : grimy snow on the houses, slushy snow on the footpaths, miry snow in the roadways, and a fresh fall just about to drop from the low-hanging, smoky, yellow sky. Everybody I met looked miserably and crossly cold. I was looking forward to a sight of Peggy's cheerful old face as a pleasant contrast, as I dived down the sewer-like arched alley that led into her court. But when I got there, both her house and the next to it stood windowless, roofless, and gutted. There were stale smoke-smears on the walls, and the grimy snow looked almost white as it furred the black, blistered joists and

rafters. The fire evidently had not been a recent one. There was no fireman on guard, no crowd hanging about, and when I made my inquiries in the court, they were answered very listlessly. 'Oh, it was three months or more ago. No, there was no old woman burnt that they'd heard of in No. 1, and no old woman carried out, so far as they knew. They were new-comers. If I was to ask at the chandler's, perhaps he could tell me about it.'

It was a relief to learn that Peggy had left the house before the fire, although I also learnt that she had left the earth. In the August after I had seen her there was much sickness in the crowded court, and she had been one of its first victims. Before she died, however, she had seen her Sam. She had died with her arm round his neck, and he had buried her.

'For a rough sailor feller,' said the chandler, 'I never see sich a soft-hearted chap. But there was something out of the common too about the old 'ooman. She never owed me a penny, an' I've seen her break great bits out of her loaf, so that it must ha' looked as if the rats had been at it, before she got home, to give to the little uns when it was sharp weather. Not that she could ha' had much to bless herself with, poor old critter. She worked for old —, the Jew slopseller, an' he don't overpay his people. I can't tell you where she was buried, or where the son is—gone to sea again most likely. All that I knowed of her was from seein' her in the shop here. If she've 'ad any money left her, you've come too late. No,

no one's lived in her place since. How could they, when it was burnt down the very night she was took out of it? The sailor chap was a cryin' because he'd lost his mother's Bible. Queer that for a sailor. P'raps there was bank-notes in it, though that ain't likely. How can I tell whether they're goin' to do the houses up again? They've 'ad to shore 'em up, an' they'll be down on our 'eads if the surveyors don't make 'em pull 'em down pretty sharp. Why, the walls has all started. An' now I hope you know all you wants to know, for I've got my customers to look to.'

I went back to have one more look at the gaping, tottering old houses, and felt glad that no vulgarer tenant would live within the walls to which Peggy had given a homely consecration. Her two earthly wishes had been gratified. Her boy had come home, and the parish had not buried her. Her garret was a black gap beneath a cheerless sky, her apple-tree was crushed beneath a heap of smoky rubbish; but wherever her body was sleeping, Peggy had exchanged her London loneliness for the 'home that will be home for ever'—her Wapping haven for that 'desired haven,' where the world-tost are 'glad because they be quiet.'

THE END.

